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ABSTRACT

Through a synthesis of ongoing case studies covering over 500 schools, this report highlights the story of school reform in the Chicago Public Schools (Illinois) at the elementary school level. The analysis draws on a case-study syntheses of field research over the past 3 years, new analyses of survey data from principals and teachers, and original field studies conducted during spring 1993 in 6 schools that have taken active advantage of the opportunities offered by reform legislation. A look at school governance finds that in some places collaboration among principals, parents, and community members is perfunctory, in others self-interested demands are advancing, and in others constituents are undertaking efforts to improve education. An examination of local school improvement takes into account the local communities' past experience with their institutions as well as larger professional conversations concerning problems of urban education and community. A formal test of the validity of a "means-ends" linkage assumed in the reform legislation found that systemic restructuring fosters instructional change. The close look at six schools found that remarkable change had taken place, but that the reform process is fragile. A final section offers a perspective from the local and national research community. (Contains 39 references and 34 endnotes.) (JB)

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A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago

A Report of the Steering Committee Consortium on Chicago School Research

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I. Introduction

A tragic story unfolded in the pages of the *Chicago Tribune*.

> Chicago Public Schools are hardly more than daytime warehouses for inferior students, taught by disillusioned and inadequate teachers, presided over by a bloated, leaderless bureaucracy, and constantly undercut by a selfish, single-minded teachers' union.[1]

The articles from the May 1988 series were subsequently compiled into a book titled *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America."* The quote in the title came from a judgment offered by then-U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett during a brief visit to Chicago. The *Tribune* concurred; the Chicago Public School system was "a disgrace."

Much of the *Tribune* series focused on a single elementary school. The conditions both inside and outside were dismal; the teaching, for the most part, was uninspired; and there was little reason to believe that things would change.

> The brick is sallow, tired-looking. Painted window frames have peeled. What passes for a play area around this rectangular, three-story fortress is a forbidding expanse of buckling pavement that spills into a back alley without the benefit of a protective fence.
>
> There are no swings. Not even a rusted jungle gym. Just the lonely poles that support three graffiti-scarred backboards stripped of all but one bent basketball rim.
>
> Classes in art and music are long gone. There are no extra-curricular activities. . . School is a place where as many as 39 students are crammed into a classroom for the five and one-half-hour school day. They get no recess, but they do get tattered and out-of-date textbooks that are often in short supply.[2]

This was much more than a story about just one school, however; the whole system was in trouble. Annual school system statistics, though less vivid, told an equally appalling story. Nearly half of the students who entered the city's eighteen economically most disadvantaged high schools dropped out before graduation. And over half of those who did manage to graduate from these high schools were still reading below the ninth-grade level.[3] Whether the focus was on system statistics or media accounts, the same message was clear: the Chicago Public Schools were "failing miserably the dual mission of preparing young people to realize the dreams that are their birthright and of providing for the city's future a qualified and productive citizenry."[4]

A change finally came by action of the Illinois legislature in December 1988. The Chicago School Reform Act (PA 85-1418) laid the groundwork for systemic reform of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

What Is Reform?

The reform package sought to weaken central power and to promote greater site-based control by devolving authority to local schools. Reform gave principals greater authority over the school budget, the physical building, and personnel decisions. For the first time, principals, freed from seniority requirements, were able to recruit and hire new teachers. Having lost their tenure and now accountable to their Local School Councils (LSCs), principals were encouraged to redirect initiatives toward local constituencies and their concerns.

The reform package created a real voice for parents and community members because each group has representatives on the LSC. These parent-majority councils have the power to hire and fire the school principal, and to approve the budget and the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Teachers were also given an expanded voice. Through their two seats on the LSC, they have direct influence on school affairs, including the choice of principal. Teachers also have advisory responsibility over school curriculum and instruction through the teacher-elected Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC).

New resources also became available to support school improvements. PA 85-1418 changed how state compensatory education funds (state Chapter 1 funds) were to be used. Money now flows to each school based on the number of disadvantaged students. Schools with many disadvantaged students received substantial increases in discretionary dollars and greater freedom as to how they could be spent.

To guide the local school change process, the Chicago School Reform Act also formulated explicit educational goals for children and an extended set of school objectives. Principals were required to develop three-year improvement plans subject to LSC approval. The central office was charged with

reporting annually on the progress of schools and with developing a systemwide plan to support local initiatives.

Thus, considered as a whole, the Chicago School Reform Act is a complex piece of legislation. It is also highly ambitious—nothing less than a complete restructuring of the third largest public school system in America was intended.

Where Are We Now?

Much confusion and conflict characterized the new system of education forming in Chicago during the 1989 and 1990 school years. From the vantage point of 1993, many schools now have had time to adjust to the major structural changes and to pursue reform in their local communities.

This report tells the story of what has happened to elementary schools in the interim. It is a diverse and varied story, as we look out over approximately 500 elementary schools within the system. In many school communities, parents, community leaders, teachers, and principals have joined together to take advantage of the resources and opportunities offered by school reform. They have instituted broad and deep changes that aim to revitalize their school as a central educative institution in their community. In other places, however, the progress of reform is uneven. Although new monetary resources are welcomed, many of the opportunities offered by reform have not been seized. There is little sense that these schools are moving forward.

Much of this report highlights the numerous accomplishments that have already occurred in Chicago school communities, but it also probes the problems and lingering concerns. It marks the current state of school reform and points toward the future.

II. Framing Our Analysis

Assessing the current state of reform is a challenging task. The Chicago School Reform Act (PA 85-1418) launched an undertaking of enormous scope that is still very much in the process of developing. The substantial diversity among Chicago's many school communities adds further complexity to any mid-term assessment of progress. Coupling these features with the novel nature of the reform itself raises difficult questions about both the choice of an appropriate framework for organizing this inquiry and the choice of standards for judging progress.

Key Issues in Developing This Evaluation

Nature of the Reform

The Chicago School Reform Act sought fundamental school change, catalyzed by a reformation in the way schools were governed. However, it did not provide a blueprint for improvement that each school was to follow. Rather than directly mandating specific educational programs and classroom changes, it focused on reclaiming initiative for parents, community members, teachers, and principals. It formulated a set of policies designed to promote opportunities for each of these participants to have a greater say in local school affairs. Reformers hoped that these new arrangements would create a political force for improvement in school communities. It was argued that such a politics could leverage the organizational changes needed to make schools more responsive to the communities, families, and students they serve and ultimately boost educational achievement. More specifically, reform would help engage all participants in the school's mission and would provide substantial support for significant changes in classroom instruction and, ultimately, in student learning. Probing this logic-in-operation became the first organizing principle for our analysis.

Variability among Individual Schools

Given the diverse nature of Chicago's neighborhoods and the different resources and circumstances in individual schools as reform began, we expected considerable diversity in how communities responded to the opportunities created by reform. It is reasonable to assume that schools with talented faculties, which have a history of cooperative work and enjoy good relations with their local

communities, would quickly take advantage of the additional resources and autonomy provided by reform to advance instructional improvement efforts. In other schools, however, where the initial conditions for reform consisted of weak faculties marred by distrust, negative community relationships, and serious problems of safety and disorder, the restructuring task is more extensive, likely to consume more resources and to take longer.

This perspective represents a second organizing principle for our analysis. Since we expected variability in how schools embrace the opportunities afforded by reform, we examined this variability and the factors that contribute to it.

A "Mid-Course" Assessment

It is also important to remember that Chicago's school reform is still in its early stages. Although the legislation was originally passed in 1988, implementation was deferred until the fall of 1989. Organizing the first Local School Council elections, training councils, and writing by-laws dominated most of the first year.[5] Thus, the 1989-90 school year was taken up almost entirely with initiating the structures and processes of local school governance. Also during that year, half of the schools were required to evaluate their principal and to make a decision either to retain or to hire a new one. (The other half of the schools made that decision in the spring of 1991.) The schools that reviewed their principal in spring 1990 were ready to begin their school improvement efforts the following fall; schools that had to wait until spring 1991 to make a change in principal leadership, however, might not really have begun improvement activities until fall 1991. In practical terms, then, about half of the schools have had three years to initiate improvements, while others have had only two years. Thus, in many school communities, the change process is still fairly new, and any fair assessment must take this factor into account as well.

Rejection of Short-Term Achievement Trends as a Standard for Assessing Progress

The primary long-term standpoint for judging school reform is very clear—have substantial improvements in student learning occurred? One might argue, by analogy, that a mid-course assessment should focus on evidence of short-term student achievement gains. Supporting this view is explicit language in PA 85-1418 calling for every Chicago school to be at national norms by 1994. It also demands annual measurable progress toward that goal.

We applaud this aspect of PA 85-1418 as a serious expression of commitment. As a realistic timetable for renewing a major urban school system with over 400,000 students and 25,000 teachers, it is simply not defensible. To the best of our knowledge, no similar aims have been attained anywhere, by anyone. Against this standard, virtually any plan for a major urban school system reform would likely fail.

The Chicago School Reform Act calls for each school to undertake a restructuring of its organization and operations. We know from past research that such organizational change can follow a myriad of paths and does not usually follow the annual improvement model prescribed in the legislation. Even the best cases of significant individual school improvement often required five or more years to culminate in a comprehensive restructuring, and typically did not show measurable change in student achievement until the later phases.[6] To be sure, substantial changes in organizational operations were occurring two and three years into the process, and there was a logic to these changes, but the "bottom line of student achievement" was one of the last things to be affected.

Thus, although improvement in student learning is the ultimate standard for evaluating the long-term success of PA 85-1418, the timing of this mid-course assessment redirects us toward an alternative standpoint.

Our Evaluative Perspective: Is School Reform Heading in a Constructive Direction?

Evaluating school reform is like trying to judge the progress of a major corporate restructuring, which could take ten years or more to unfold fully. Short-term profitability (in our case, changes in test scores) is not an adequate criterion against which to assess progress. In fact, short-term profits might plummet as losses are incurred in the process of reshaping the basic mission and operating procedures. Instead, we need to look more closely at the ongoing organizational rearrangements to determine whether the intended changes are in fact occurring and whether the new arrangements operate as planned.

More specifically, since the basic premise of PA 85-1418 is to enhance parent, community, and professional participation as a lever to improve schools, this report addresses the following questions:

- **How are the new governance structures actually functioning in Chicago's schools?** Is there any evidence that a local school politics supporting educational improvement has emerged?
- **What types of improvement efforts are**

underway? Are schools pursuing a systemic approach to school development, or are improvement efforts fragmented with little attention paid to quality? Are school actions consistent with established "best practices" that are likely to lead to increased student achievement?

- **What connections exist between the evolution of local school governance and the types of school improvement efforts underway?** Where new participation has emerged in the school, is there any evidence that it provides an effective lever for educational improvement?

In a school system as large and as diverse as Chicago's, almost everything imaginable is probably happening somewhere. For this reason, we approach the above questions from the following perspective:

- What are the **major patterns** in local school governance and school improvement efforts occurring in the city?
- **How frequently** are these various patterns occurring?
- **How equitably** are they distributed among school communities, specifically with regard to race/ethnicity and income level?

Research Bases for This Report

This report draws on three interrelated strands of activity:

1. A case-study synthesis of field research on Chicago school communities over the last three years.[7] This generated the conceptual framework used in this report and led to the development of a small number of "types" to characterize the major patterns in local school governance and school improvement activities.

2. New analyses of Consortium survey data from principals and teachers and other extant CPS data.[8] From this we created a set of indicators of the specific types of school governance and school improvement activities occurring in each school. These indicators allow us to address questions about the frequency and distribution of these various types and to test more directly the linkage between enhanced local school participation, organizational restructuring, and instructional improvement.

3. Original field studies conducted during spring 1993 in six Chicago elementary schools that have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded by reform to initiate school restructuring. The study of the Experiences of Actively Restructuring Schools (EARS) provides clues about the key ingredients for successful school development under PA 85-1418. The problems and concerns identified here also help us to identify the current state of school reform.

We have woven the results of these activities together into an integrated assessment of the state of school reform in the city. Our focus here is on elementary schools where average achievement levels were substantially below national norms when reform began in 1989.9 These elementary schools, which make up 86 percent of the system, were the primary target of PA 85-1418. The effects of PA 85-1418 on the higher-achieving schools (schools near or above national norms) are discussed separately. (See "Impact on the Initially High-Achieving Schools on page 24.)

III. Local School Governance

Chicago school reform encourages greater involvement in school affairs, not only by parents and community members but also by principals and teachers. It attempts to reform relationships within the school so that parents and community members (through the Local School Council), the faculty (through the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee and other school committees), and the principal each becomes a significant "site of power" to advance school improvement. Moreover, the legislation creates a complex system of checks and balances among these three sites of power. Local School Council (LSC) and Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) members can be voted out of office. The contract of a nonresponsive principal might not be renewed by the LSC. School

faculties might organize to press the principal and LSC for their own version of school improvement.

Key to understanding the early effects of the Chicago School Reform Act (PA 85-1418) is the fact that each of the three local sites of power (the LSC, the principal, and the faculty) now has the potential to develop its own leadership and to challenge "the way things are done around here." This means that in every school there are multiple opportunities where leadership for change could emerge. Parents and community members, teachers, and the principal are charged to work together on key planning and improvement decisions. In some cases, this collaboration appears perfunctory, with all important decisions effectively being made by the principal; in other places, school reform provides occasions for advancing self-interested demands; in still others, all constituents are now actively undertaking efforts to enhance education for all children.

Politics as a Lever for School Improvement?

Chicago school reform conceives of politics as a constructive force for school improvement. This view seems strange to many, both in Chicago and elsewhere. After all, traditional notions of politics—and especially notorious Chicago machine politics—conjure up images of cutting deals in smoke-filled back rooms. Such politics are typically concerned with jobs, contracts, and power, not with the needs of schoolchildren.

Previous studies of individual school politics offer similar themes. The players and the prizes are different, but the processes are analogous. Individual teachers negotiate with their principal for the best students, materials, and space. Parents ask for the best teachers, programs, and so on for their own children.[10] These negotiations distribute resources and placate people, but because the stakeholders are self-motivated and the interests are largely fixed, the process is unlikely to restructure a school. Rather, like the city politics described above, it is a means of maintaining smooth operations rather than advancing fundamental change.

Chicago school reform has promoted some of this interest politics, but the legislation has also precipitated other forms of political behavior. As parents, teachers, and the principal assume power, core operations are now subject to scrutiny in some schools. Questions are being raised about the purposes and mission of schooling; what constitutes a "good" school; appropriate roles for teachers, students, and families; and how to best serve **all** children and plan for their needs.

Furthermore, Chicago school politics continues to evolve. In many schools, reform has engendered a broad base of participation, not only in the LSC, but also in parent and community groups and in school faculties. As individuals talk to and get to know each other, their ideas change and their skills develop. Coalitions form, and so do competing ideas about how to organize and manage the school. Leadership development is evident as well. This may take the form of strengthened principal leadership in some schools, an activist council in others, with collective faculty action apparent in still others.

It is clear that the full breadth of political activity occurring in Chicago's school communities cannot be understood simply as a competition among individual interests and groups over scarce resources. These observations about the early implementation of reform led us to develop a broader conceptualization for framing our analysis. We turned for guidance to recent writings about local citizen participation and renewal of public institutions.[11] Although these arguments vary somewhat, they all advance a common theme that is germane to Chicago school reform—**enhanced democratic activity at the local level can be an effective antidote to unresponsive societal institutions like urban public schools**. Key here is the commitment to sustained public conversation within small communities about the organization of common affairs. Over time, such discussions can lead to better understandings about how best to advance the collective well-being of the school community.

In places where this form of strong democratic politics has emerged, public discussion about the school and its responsibilities to children, their families, and the community now vie with more narrowly defined interests. This political activity can occur in a variety of contexts. The LSC provides the major site for parents and community to engage in this political debate.[12] It can also occur in individual negotiations with the principal and in various faculty meetings and school committees. Principals hold substantial power both by virtue of the changes made by PA 85-1418 and more generally through their technical knowledge and role authority. Similarly, teachers' professional expertise can empower them as well. When a school faculty coalesces as a viable group, their authority over school affairs grows because they control classroom life. In sum, while PA 85-1418 sought to expand citizen participation, effective school change requires regular productive interactions across the three sites of power.

Three Sites of Local Power

These general observations from the case-study synthesis project directed our attention to a more careful scrutiny of the workings of each site of power. We identified a number of salient features that helped us to distinguish important differences among schools in the operations of local school governance. We then used survey information in the Consortium's data archive to develop specific indicators for each of these characteristics.

Inclusive Principal Leadership

Principals broadly influence the activities of their schools. They may facilitate the participation of both parents and faculty in decision making or may effectively block their involvement. They may encourage a search for new ideas that might push the school in new directions or, alternatively, they may discourage innovation while maintaining the status quo.

We have identified eight indicators for the principal site of power that measure a variety of behaviors and attitudes associated with inclusive leadership. One group of indicators focuses on how principals use their time and whether there is priority given to expanding the human and social resources of the school. A second group of indicators assesses principals' willingness to share power with teachers over central school control functions. A third group measures principal leadership style. In order for change to occur, principals must be willing to let conflict about educational issues surface and even create structures for such new ideas to arise. Thus, the leadership indicators portray a principal who includes others in the administration of the school and is open to substantive discussion about how the educational process should be conducted.

Based on an examination of the schools in the case-study synthesis project, we found that principals who have strong positive responses to three or more of the individual indicators of inclusive principal leadership tended to be active promoters of broad participation within their schools. Applying this criterion to the Consortium's survey data on Chicago public elementary schools, we estimate that 46 percent of CPS principals display inclusive leadership.

Indicators of Inclusive Principal Leadership

Priority use of time on
- Personal professional development
- Teacher/staff development
- Working with parent and community groups

- *Teachers' roles* should be broad in school budgeting and hiring professional staff

Leadership style
- Views conflict as necessary for change
- Relies on committees to resolve conflict
- Encourages structured teacher input
- Supports teachers in taking on administrative tasks

Collective Faculty Action

For teachers to exert organizational influence over curricular or other matters, they must have regular opportunities to articulate their views as a group. They must feel comfortable in raising concerns and have a sense that their ideas have some influence over school policy. Teachers must be involved in the primary strategic planning activity of school reform, the School Improvement Plan, and be willing to spend time working together on various school committees. In its most advanced forms, collective faculty action means not just collegial decision making but also coordinated work. We have assembled seven different indicators to tap these various facets of collective faculty action.

Indicators of Collective Faculty Activity

Teacher voice
- Teachers feel safe to express opinions.

Teacher influence
- Teachers have influence over a range of school decisions.

Strategic planning
- Teachers agree that they know about and are involved in implementing the SIP.
- Principal reports that PPAC plays an important role in developing new programs and ideas.

Collective activity
- Teachers work frequently on school committees.
- Teachers participate frequently on the PPAC.

Teacher collegiality
- Principal reports that teachers coordinate their work.

Schools in the case-study synthesis project with highly engaged faculties offered five or more positive responses to indicators of collective faculty action. If we apply this criterion to all elementary schools, 18 percent of the school faculties would be classified as highly engaged. Schools with positive responses to three to four indicators represented moderate teacher activity in the decision-making process. This category contains an additional 33 percent of the elementary schools. Combining these figures, slightly more than one-half of the schools are reporting moderate to extensive activity in the faculty as a site of power.

Active Local School Council

The LSCs in a number of the case-study synthesis schools were significant sites of power. These councils engaged in substantive conversations and made important decisions. Unfortunately, the Consortium data archive does not include LSC survey data. As a result, we were unable to measure the full range of activity occurring in the councils.[13] We were able, however, to identify whether the LSC was a functional, working group. At a minimum, LSCs must meet regularly, have structures for advancing work outside of meetings, and engage participation from the broader school community. Without at least this minimal level of structure and activity, a council cannot function as a viable group.

We have identified seven different indicators of a functional LSC. In the case-study synthesis sites, a failure to "score positive" on two or more of these indicators pointed to a nonfunctional LSC. For example, LSCs that meet less than once a month and have no standing subcommittees to conduct work outside of LSC meetings are highly unlikely to be influencing policies at the school. When the LSC indicators are examined for all Chicago public elementary schools, we find that 19 percent of the LSCs fall into this nonfunctional category.

Indicators of an Active Local School Council

- At least one LSC meeting per month
- At least one subcommittee
- An average of three or more guests per meeting
- Four or more stable parent/community members on the LSC since the second election
- More than five percent of parents voting in the second election
- At least as many parent/community candidates in the second election as positions available on the LSC
- Principal does not strongly agree with the statement: "I am able to get the LSC to do what I want."

Types of Local School Politics

The interplay among the three sites of power shapes a distinctive local school politics. Based on the case-study synthesis, we identified four general types that broadly categorize this activity in Chicago public elementary schools during the first four years of reform.

1. Consolidated Principal Power occurs when neither the parents/community nor the faculty are able to sustain an active involvement in school decision making. By default, power consolidates in the principalship. Principal leadership in these schools tends to take one of two forms. In some schools, autocratic principals rule by private coercion; other schools tend to function more like families where the principal is a paternal/maternal figure to whom parents and faculty defer.

2. Adversarial Politics occurs when school communities are factionalized and continuously at war about control and power. The fights tend to have little substantive content. Instead they focus on personalities and allegiances—first, who will be elected to the LSC, and then who the LSC will select as principal. In schools characterized by sustained conflict, it is difficult for principals to exert strong leadership and unite the warring factions within the parent and faculty groups. There may be multiple turnovers in leadership—not only in the principalship, but on the LSC and PPAC as well. These schools are often unable to make basic decisions and are constantly stalled by the struggle for power.

3. Maintenance Politics occurs when parents, teachers, and the principal are basically satisfied with existing arrangements and are not strongly motivated to change them. Much of the principal's activity in such schools mediates among competing interests, for example, placating the demands of parents who want the best for their own children, and responding to the requests of teachers who wish to advance their own individual interests. Similar dynamics can occur within the LSC. The interest politics that characterizes this school type serves to maintain smooth operations by deflecting fundamental challenges to those operations.

4. Strong Democracy occurs when there is dissatisfaction with current operations, sustained debate about school change, and shared interests

emerge across the three sites of power to promote school improvement. Principal initiative is a main route to strong democracy. In some schools, principals have seized reform as an opportunity for change and mobilized support among their parents and faculty. Alternatively, teachers may become broadly involved in school decision making and actually search out new programs and curricula, which they then promote in their school. Finally, parents and community members might activate the LSC as a venue for school change.

Prevalence of Local School Politics Types

Identifying adversarial schools is relatively straightforward. The intense friction in these schools often factionalize the faculty and LSC, and can undermine any attempts by a principal to create a politics of inclusion. Thus, the presence of sustained conflict overshadows everything else. The Consortium's teacher survey (1991) and principal survey (1992) each include four indicators of school conflict in the LSC, with the community, and, more generally, in the school. Consistent negative reports from these two sources provide highly reliable information for identifying schools in this category. The two adversarial schools in the case-study synthesis "tripped" more than six of these indicators. None of the other schools in the case-study synthesis tripped more than one.

An upper bound for the number of schools enduring persistent strife is nine percent. In these schools, both principals and teachers reported strong dissension on at least one indicator of conflict in the LSC, the community, or in the school. The number of schools where principals and teachers each reported two or more indicators of conflict provides a lower bound of four percent. Thus, depending on the criteria used, we estimate that adversarial politics is occurring in four to nine percent of Chicago elementary schools.

Based on the indicator sets for the three sites of power introduced earlier, we are able to clearly classify schools as having either consolidated principal power or strong democracy.[14] In general, the consolidated power schools do not display broad participation in the decision-making process of the school. In these schools, the principal is not generally oriented toward inclusive leadership, and teachers do not report having a sense of agency in school affairs. We estimate that 39 to 46 percent of the elementary schools fall into this category.

In contrast, strong democracy schools are more likely to have a principal who engenders discussion about key educational issues, teachers who are collectively active in the planning process, and a Local School Council that meets regularly and draws in other participants. We estimate that this form of strong democracy is present in 23 to 32 percent of the elementary schools.

Finally, we classify 14 to 24 percent of the schools in a "mixed" category. Maintenance politics schools are included in this group. Theoretically, the incidence of maintenance politics should be relatively low since all of the schools included in this analysis had average Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP) scores significantly below national norms in 1989. The need for improvement is very visible in these schools, and broad, active participation in maintaining the status quo seems unlikely. The available indicator data were unable to distinguish maintenance politics schools from other schools with some features of both consolidated principal power and strong democracy.[15]

Validity of the Indicator System

A critical validity test for the indicator sets used in this report is that they correctly distinguish among the case-study synthesis schools in terms of the types of politics and improvement efforts that were observed. Based solely on the field observations in the case-study synthesis sites, we categorized each school in terms of the school politics and improvement types. In total, 42 schools were used for the validity assessment of the school politics indicators, and 41 schools were used for examining the school improvement indicators.

In general, all of the individual indicators for politics and school improvement classified the case-study synthesis schools in the same way as the field observations. When the individual indicators were combined into four summary measures for local school politics and two summary measures for school improvement, these composite indicators were highly accurate tools in categorizing the case-study synthesis schools. Ninety-six percent of the sites classified as consolidated power or strong democracy by field staff were classified correctly by our analysis. Similarly, 92 percent of the case-study schools were classified correctly in terms of an unfocused versus systemic restructuring approach by the indicator analysis. In general, then, there is strong empirical validation for the indicator system.

Prevalence of Local School Politics

1. Consolidated Principal Power
39% to 46%

Reform has not catalyzed change in relations of power.

Sites of power:
- *Principal* consolidates power (autocratic or paternal/maternal).
- *Parents and community members* cannot challenge principal or initiate activity.
- *Teachers* cannot organize or sustain collective action.

2. Adversarial Politics
4% to 9%

Sustained conflict over control.

Sites of power:
- *Principal* cannot establish leadership (multiple turnovers).
- *Parents and community members* tend to be factionalized.
- *Teachers* also tend to be factionalized.

3. Maintenance Politics
14% to 24%*

Stakeholders are complacent.

Little substantive discussion about broad school change.

Sites of power:
- *Principal* publicly negotiates interest group politics.
- *Parents* function as an interest group for their own children. *Community members* may act as representatives of external groups.
- *Teachers* advance their individual interests.

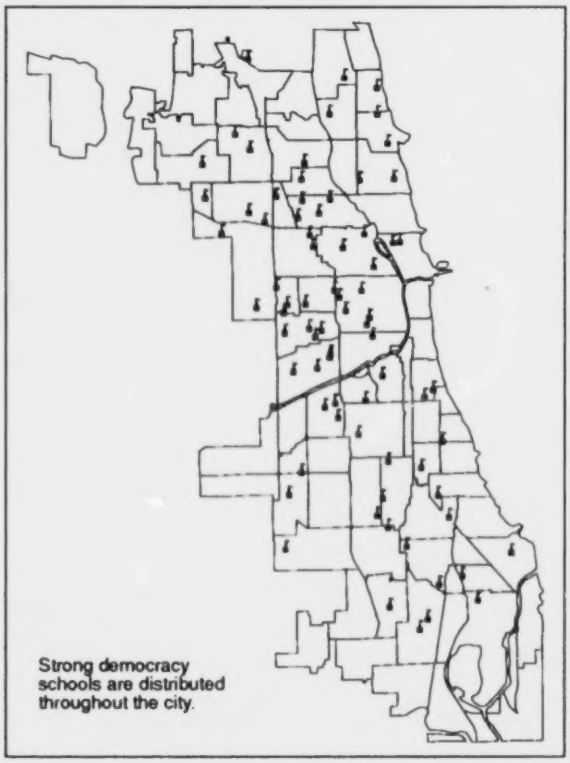
4. Strong Democracy
23% to 32%

Sustained debate across sites of power about:
- school improvement,
- the goals and mission of the school, and
- what is good for children.

Sites of power:
- *Principal* might initiate discussion about change.
- *Parents and community members* (through the LSC) can also be proactive.
- *Teachers* also tend to be proactive.

*These percentages apply to schools classified as "mixed" politics.

Strong Democracy Schools



Strong democracy schools are distributed throughout the city.

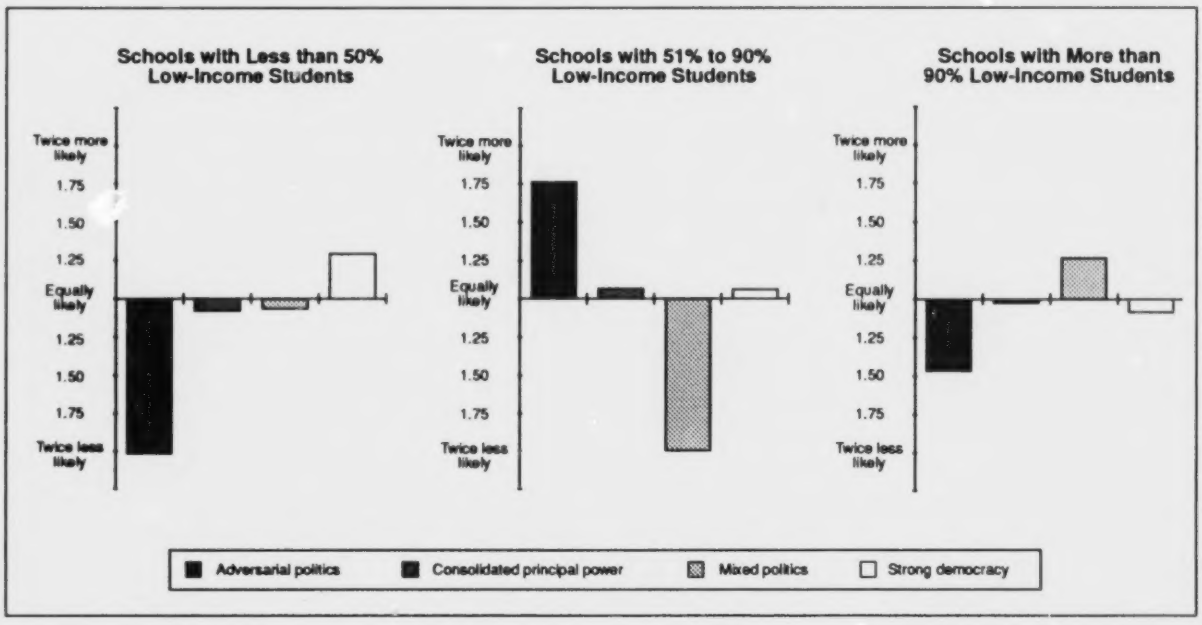
How School Characteristics Affect School Politics

Chicago schools vary substantially from one another in terms of the percentage of low-income students, the racial composition of students, school size, and student mobility rates. Each of the four categories of school politics can be found in schools with virtually any combination of these factors. The strong democracy schools, for example, are broadly distributed across the city. Nevertheless, certain types of politics are more prevalent under certain circumstances.[16]

Low-Income Composition

Chicago elementary schools educate mostly poor children. Sixty percent of the schools scoring below 235 on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP) have over 90 percent low-income students; only nine percent of the schools have fewer than one-half low-income students. The relative prevalence of school political types is related to the income composition of the school. In relatively advantaged schools (schools with less than 50 percent low-income students), adversarial politics occurs twice less often than it does in the system as a whole. This politics is more likely to occur in schools with a more diverse school poverty level (between 50 and 90 percent low-income students) and is, again, underrepresented in the most impoverished schools (more than 90

School Politics and Percentage of Low-Income Students



13

percent low-income students). In contrast, mixed politics is much less likely to occur in the mid-range school poverty level while they are slightly over-represented in the most impoverished schools.

Strong democracy is somewhat overrepresented in the relatively advantaged schools, occurring about 1.25 times more often than it does in the system as a whole. Given the higher level of human and social resources in these school communities when reform began, these results are not surprising.

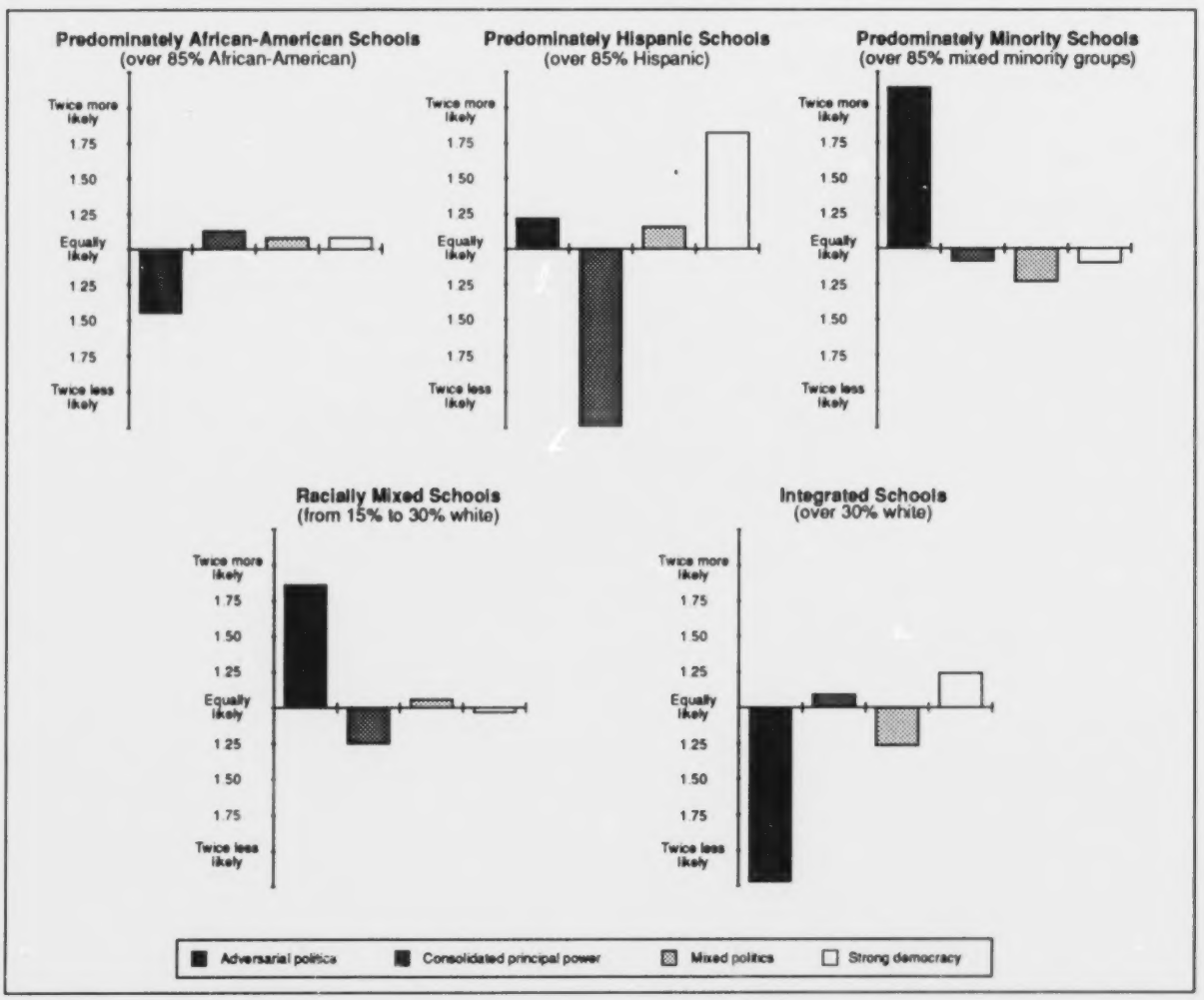
It is important to note that the presence of consolidated principal power appears unrelated to the income composition of the school. In terms of a simple comparison between the most advantaged schools and the most disadvantaged schools, the prevalence of the various types of school politics appears quite similar.

Racial Composition

Schools that are either predominately minority or racially mixed experienced adversarial politics at considerably higher rates than all other racial/ethnic categories. These schools have students from many different backgrounds, which may contribute to the diversity of interests in the school and make conflict somewhat more likely. In contrast, both predominantly African-American and integrated schools display less adversarial politics than expected.

Hispanic schools demonstrate a marked tendency toward strong democracy. In fact, 52 percent of the

School Politics and School Racial Composition



predominately Hispanic schools are in this category. Correspondingly, these schools are over twice less likely to have consolidated principal power. This particularly favorable pattern in racially isolated Hispanic schools runs counter to early media accounts of school conflict. A closer scrutiny of "what these schools may be doing right" is certainly in order.

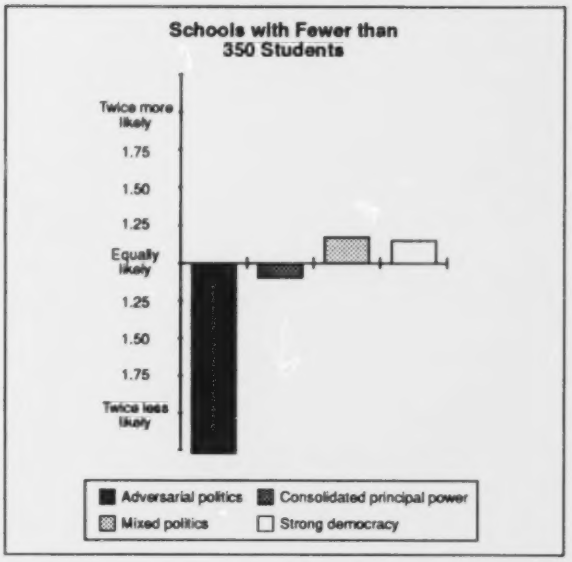
School Size

In smaller schools, it is easier to maintain personal interaction and informal exchange between participants. Not surprisingly, adversarial politics is considerably less likely in schools with fewer than 350 students. Mixed politics and strong democracy also occur slightly more often in small schools. These results imply that small school size minimizes the likelihood of sustained conflict and can facilitate the emergence of strong democracy. The emergence of the latter, however, is by no means assured.

Student Mobility

We observed no distinctive differences here. The prevalence of school political types appears unaffected by the level of student mobility in the school.

School Politics and Small Schools



IV. Local School Improvement

In order to appreciate fully the approaches toward school improvement, it is important to understand the perspectives that shape these initiatives. Local participants' past experiences in their communities and with their schools provide an important grounding for their views about needed improvements. This local analysis, however, also interacts with larger professional conversations about the problems of truly disadvantaged urban communities and the need to promote systemic school change. Taken together, this local history and professional discourse offer a set of ideas that frame participants' understandings of their own conditions and possible routes to improve them.

Urban School Communities and Systemic Reform

Over the last two decades, profound economic and social changes have swept over our nation's major cities. Many urban neighborhoods have been ravaged by a loss of basic institutions—businesses, churches, banks, and community organizations. Concerns for personal safety are paramount, and residential mobility is high as families seek better housing and a safer place for their children. Mistrust characterizes many social encounters among residents and with their public institutions.[18] The relationships among extended families and neighbors who know and care about each

other normally provide a valuable social resource to a school. In many urban school communities, however, this social capital is now limited.[19]

Schools and Families

A major problem for many schools early in reform was convincing parents and students that the neighborhood school could be a different public institution, and that parents and students could now be effective agents to improve local conditions. A key first step in this regard was making the school a safer and more caring place for children and their families.

More generally, many Chicago schools have focused considerable effort on strengthening ties to their parent community and local neighborhood. In part, this is a strategy to draw in outside resources to support the instructional programs of the school. But in some truly disadvantaged neighborhoods, strengthening community ties indicates a more fundamental rethinking about how schools could take a more constructive role, joining with other neighborhood institutions, to redress the damages wrought by the larger economic and social forces at work in urban centers.

Schools and Teachers

School faculties were disempowered at the onset of reform. The 1970s and 1980s imposed many mandates on urban public schools. Schools became more complex organizations where many teachers had little knowledge of the full range of programs occurring in their buildings and often had little opportunity to interact with colleagues. Moreover, these externally imposed changes often made teachers' work more difficult and less effective. Many teachers became cynical. They defined a narrow range of responsibilities for themselves and maintained a skeptical view of those outside. The promising ideas of earlier reforms had come and gone. Thus, convincing teachers that the reform legislation could improve work conditions and help them make a difference in their school would be an important first step.

Moreover, much like parents, many teachers had been accustomed to being told what to do. Reform was almost as novel to them as it was to parents and community members. If schools were to improve, however, the faculty would have to be collectively engaged in these efforts. Creating structures for teachers to participate in decision making is a starting point toward the ultimate aim of promoting greater collective professional responsibility for the school as a caring social institution for the community's children.

Schools and Money

The fiscal crises that have plagued the school system since the late 1970s have left a legacy of decaying buildings and insufficient instructional materials. Basic supplies like pencils, paper, chalk, and toilet paper might be lacking on any given day. Teachers regularly used their own money in order to fill basic classroom needs. Even out-of-date textbooks were often in short supply. Thus, many Chicago schools were exceptionally resource poor as reform began.

Not surprisingly, as new discretionary resources became available under PA 85-1418, many schools moved quickly to replenish libraries, buy new textbooks, add computers to their instructional programs, and refurbish their environments. Urban educators sought to emulate their suburban counterparts. "If advantaged kids have fine arts, foreign language, and music programs," they reasoned, "why shouldn't our kids have them too?" Moreover, expenditures on new programs and materials offer highly visible signs that "things are changing." Particularly in the context of the weak level of influence wielded by parents and teachers in many schools in the past, such expenditures could be very strategic first steps toward rebuilding participation in the school community.

Ideas about Improvement

This concern about more equitable educational opportunities is paired with an important understanding about school quality and the appropriate strategies to promote school improvement. Many think that good schools have more programs, materials, and equipment, and the way to improve schools involves adding more specialized programs, staff, and technology. In fact, some of the add-ons Chicago schools have chosen since reform—such as tutorial programs, adult mentoring, expanded preschool, and an extended school day—are among the best practices currently available for strengthening urban schools. Others, such as drill and practice software to improve student performance on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, are of more dubious value.

Current professional rhetoric, however, now challenges schools to take a more systematic look at all school operations.[20] Even when new programs are quality additions, some researchers argue that they tend to be layered on top of many other innovations. The end result is an incoherent school life for both students and teachers. In this kind of school, for example, there is little instructional coordination among teachers in the same grade level, across adjacent levels, and between classroom teachers and

various program specialists. Special programs and regular classroom instruction might combine incompatible philosophies side by side. While many of the individual programs may be quite good, the overall school effectiveness is not.

Some Chicago schools have taken this systemic reform argument seriously. While still adding new programs, these additions are specifically chosen to complement an overall improvement plan. Central to such a plan is sustained attention to basic school operations including core instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Staff development becomes a primary concern. Unlike instructional improvement efforts in some schools that engage only a few interested teachers, in a school pursuing a systemic approach, a much larger cross-section of teachers is involved. The ultimate aim is to reform schools as professional communities committed to constantly improving their responsiveness to the educational needs of children and families.

Even within a systemic approach, however, schools may still pursue a highly particularist vision of what is best for them and their students. This might mean instituting an Afrocentric curriculum, creating a truly bilingual environment where English and Spanish are both spoken with ease, or recreating the school as a center of community life that educates parents and other community members as well as students. From this perspective, the aim of decentralization was not simply to devolve previously centralized decision making down into schools so that more people are now involved in making the same old decisions. Rather, it was hoped that decentralized governance would enable school communities to shape distinctive forms of school life particularly sensitive to needs of their students and families. In the past, local school professionals tended to look up to the bureaucracy for guidance, and typically "one best answer" was sent back to all schools. Now staff are encouraged to look out into their own school communities.

A Capacity for Self-Guidance

The increased school autonomy has also brought new responsibilities for local school professionals. Prior to reform, the basic systems of instructional guidance (i.e., curriculum, staff development, and assessment) and the closely allied functions of strategic analysis (budgeting, planning, and evaluation) were all centralized. Now that schools are free to envision their own futures, local decision makers must master all of these elements in guiding their own school development. Not surprisingly, schools' initial experiences are highly varied. Some are struggling with good intentions but poor execution. Others have planned and followed through successfully on some changes and are now building on their initial successes.

Types of Local School Improvement

Drawing on these ideas and field observations from the case-study synthesis project, we have identified five different types of school improvement initiatives.

1. Environmental Order issues took precedence in many Chicago schools when reform began. In some places, this meant taking a school that might have been "out of control" and turning it into a "safe haven" that was secure for children, welcoming of parents, and providing an orderly work environment for professional staff. More generally, schools used new discretionary funds to purchase basic materials and supplies, and to repair and rejuvenate their building and grounds. Schools professionals sought to build positive ties to their families and communities. They also worked with parents to start new discipline and attendance programs and other initiatives intended to motivate children.

2. Peripheral Academic Changes have occurred in many schools where a more systemic improvement process has not yet developed. These schools pursue a generic conception of a "good school" that may have little relation to local needs. Funds are used to add programs and personnel haphazardly to the periphery of the school. While these add-on programs, such as computer centers and art and music programs, may be valuable additions, they neither enhance the core instruction provided to most students nor improve the classroom practice of most teachers.

3. "Christmas Tree" Schools resemble peripheral academic change schools; however, their efforts toward improvement are more expansive. In essence, Christmas tree schools are showcases. Their entrepreneurial principals become well known for their ability to garner new resources for their schools. As a result, these schools "look good" in terms of the programs, personnel, materials, and resources that they acquire. Unfortunately, this pursuit of new initiatives distracts the school community from a systematic examination of core operations. Additionally, there is little time to scrutinize the quality of the new programs or their cumulative effects on students' learning. The "branches" of the Christmas tree school may glitter with new ornaments while the trunk of the tree—the vitality of the school's

Classifying School Improvements during Reform

School improvement efforts can be differentiated into five types, constituting three major approaches:

Improving Social Relations

1. Environmental Order

- Emphasis on safety, order, security, discipline
- Building repairs
- Reestablishing norms, social control
- Renewing ties to parents, community

Unfocused Academic Initiatives

2. Peripheral Academic Changes

- Accrual of "add-on" programs with little innovation
- Limited focus on improving core teaching
- Absence of coherent planning
- Little active resource seeking

3. "Christmas Tree" Schools

- "Showcase" schools with many new programs
- Multiple "add-ons" with little coordination
- Little attention to strengthening organizational core
- Entrepreneurial principals actively seeking resources

Systemic Approaches to School Restructuring

4. Emergent Restructuring

- Purposeful and sustained discussion about school programs
- Some comprehensive, school-specific activities
- Some collective teacher effort at instructional improvement
- Further strengthening of school environment

5. Sustained Systemic Activity

- Shared, unified, coherent school vision
- Changes in place that affect most classrooms
- Extensive staff development for most teachers
- High teacher commitment
- Environmental changes institutionalized

core program—may go largely unattended.

4. Emergent Restructuring schools spend time discussing change initiatives, trying out new ideas, and seeking to involve an ever-growing core of faculty and parents in these efforts. Principals strive to connect the school with outside sources of expertise—professional development for faculty that focuses on core academic areas of literacy, math, and science, and also programs and people that can help the school to better support its families. In emergent restructuring schools, subgroups of the faculty are often involved in professional development activities that are intended to enhance classroom practice in specific content areas across grade levels. Teacher leadership is emergent within this core group, as individual teachers develop expertise on specific topics and begin to carve out new leadership roles for themselves. Likewise, an expanding group of parents has made a long-term commitment to working with the school, and they actively recruit other parents to join them.

5. Sustained Systemic Activity occurs when the restructuring efforts described above have had time to develop and mature within a school. Schools characterized by sustained systemic activity are essentially new organizations. New norms of collaborative work have become institutionalized among professional staff, and collegiality rather than hierarchical line control characterizes the relationship between teachers and the principal. Structures are in place to ensure that teachers have time for planning and professional development. Also, instructional leadership is no longer the sole responsibility of the principal; teachers now have new leadership roles that are fully accepted among the faculty. Faculty work together to coordinate their teaching and instructional programs, maintain quality control, and expand both their influence and responsibility as decision-makers in the school. More generally, adults in the school community share responsibility for students' achievement and well-being; and parents, teachers, and principals have learned to work together to meet the needs of children and to support families.

Specific Indicators of Local School Improvement

During the first year or two of reform, a large portion of the system focused on environmental order and improving the social relations in school communities. Now virtually all schools have moved into one of the other four categories. The major distinction among these four categories is between schools pursuing unfocused improvement initiatives (types 2 and 3) and those taking a more systemic route (types 4 and 5). These two major approaches differ in terms of the work relationships among the professional staff, the ways in which the school engages parents and community, the scope of the connections to outside expertise and ideas, and teachers' orientation toward change.

Unfocused Approaches

A number of salient features characterize schools pursuing an unfocused approach to improvement. Principals in these schools prefer a traditional work organization and shun changes in teacher roles. Parents and community members have limited involvement in the school and may not be particularly supportive of school staff. Teachers tend to be isolated from each other and from outside organizations. As a result, there are few routes for new ideas to enter the school, and faculties tend to repeat past practices and haphazardly adopt add-on strategies. Teachers in these schools do not connect the failures of student learning to a need to change their classroom practices. As a result, school efforts at improvement are less likely to focus on core instruction.

We identified 13 indicators from both teacher and principal reports that capture most of the prominent features of schools pursuing unfocused approaches to improvement.

Systemic Approaches

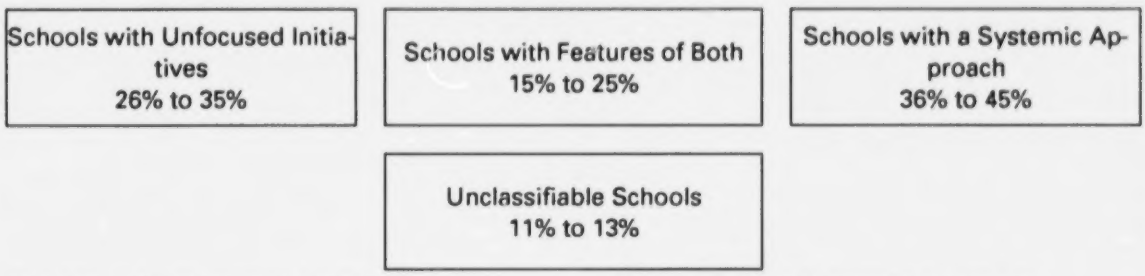
In contrast, schools pursuing a systemic approach place a strong emphasis on broad participation in school improvement planning. Teachers have a say in school decision making, and they are experimenting with new roles, including collaborative work. Parents and community are likely to be engaged in the school in a variety of ways, and the quality of these relationships is very positive. Teachers are oriented toward changing their practices to make the school a more responsive institution for children and their families. While a range of initiatives may be undertaken, some attention to changing classroom practices is maintained.

We have identified 13 indicators that characterize schools in this group.

Prevalence of School Improvement Types

Based on two composite measures formed from the 13 indicators for unfocused initiatives and 13 for systemic approaches, we were able to classify the improvement efforts of Chicago public elementary

Prevalence of School Improvement Approaches



Schools with Unfocused Initiatives

Nonsupportive leadership

- Principal tends to be autocratic
- Principal avoids conflict
- Principal feels participatory management will fade

Limited community contact

- Marginal ties with the neighboring community
- A sense of distrust between parents and teachers

Isolated faculty

- Few contacts with external educational organizations
- Limited collegial planning among teachers
- Little sense among faculty of a school mission
- Relatively few teachers participate in individual professional development
- Few changes among teachers at the school

Externalization of responsibility

- Teachers report students are not capable of learning the material
- Teachers report that students' attitudes and habits reduce their ability to learn
- Teachers report that reform has not affected their classroom practices

Schools with a Systemic Approach

Strategic educational planning

- Schoolwide participation in development of the SIP
- Broad teacher engagement with the planning process
- Increased time commitment by faculty
- Much attention to effective implementation of the SIP

Engagement of parents and community resources

- Positive relations with the surrounding community
- Increased informal communication with parents
- Substantial communication among LSC, community members, and teachers

Professional community

- Restructuring and extension of teachers' roles
- Active collaboration among teachers
- A sense of collegiality in the faculty
- Principal reports high teacher commitment
- Broad teacher influence in decision-making

Orientation toward change

- Teachers report instructional practices will change due to SIP

schools.[21] We estimate that between 26 and 35 percent of all schools follow an unfocused school improvement approach. We found in the case-study synthesis that such schools are relying on "add-on" programs that leave core instruction largely untouched. These schools also engage in limited discussion about educational issues and have little collective teacher activity or collective sense of responsibility.

Between 36 and 45 percent of the Chicago public elementary schools show characteristics of systemic improvement efforts. Case-study synthesis schools in this category are developing well-integrated improvement programs, specifically designed for their own students and circumstances, which are more likely to deal with core instructional issues. Stronger, more meaningful ties between the school, the parents, and the community are now a part of the definition of "what this school is about." Teachers are more involved; they share responsibility; and they are more likely to be changing their regular classroom instruction.

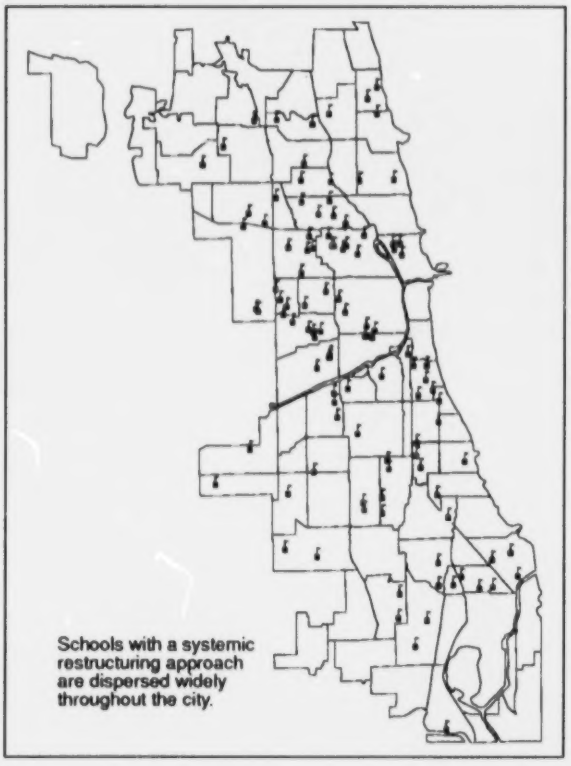
Of the remaining schools that do not fall clearly into either the unfocused or systemic approaches, two distinct patterns emerge. First, between 15 and 25 percent of the schools show some features of both approaches. This is not at all surprising considering the realities of change and improvement. These schools may begin to move toward systemic change and perhaps suffer a setback. Or a subgroup of teachers may have begun working together, but their efforts have not yet broadly affected the school. In general, a systemic approach to school improvement requires time, commitment, and energy from teachers and principals. This process can get sidetracked easily.

Finally, we note that 11 to 13 percent of the schools have inconsistent information; that is, they report strong characteristics of both systemic and unfocused approaches. We are unable to classify these schools.

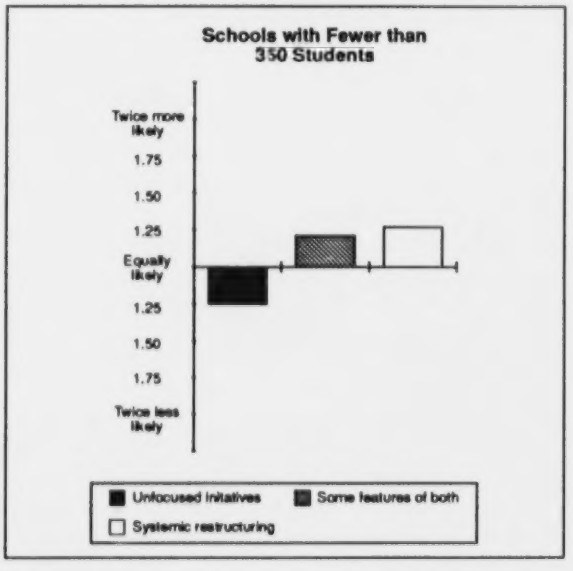
How School Characteristics Affect Improvement Efforts

In general, both unfocused and systemic restructuring initiatives can be found in a diverse array of schools, regardless of where they are located and what types of students they enroll. The map shows that systemic improvement efforts are widely distributed around the city. Both pre-reform achievement and the economic composition of the student group are unrelated to the type of improvement efforts found in schools. Among the schools considered in the analysis (i.e., the 86 percent

Schools with a Systemic Restructuring Approach



School Improvement Approaches and Small Schools



of the system with pre-reform achievement significantly below national norms), the schools with unfocused improvement efforts had average 1989 IGAP scores of 184, and the schools now in the systemic group were at 188. Similarly, the average percentage of low income students in the schools in these two groups were virtually identical. That is, systemic approaches to school improvement are evident in the poorest schools as well as in relatively more advantaged ones. In general, the opportunities provided by PA 85-1418 for school improvement have been equitably accessed by schools across the system. A few differences are worth noting, however.

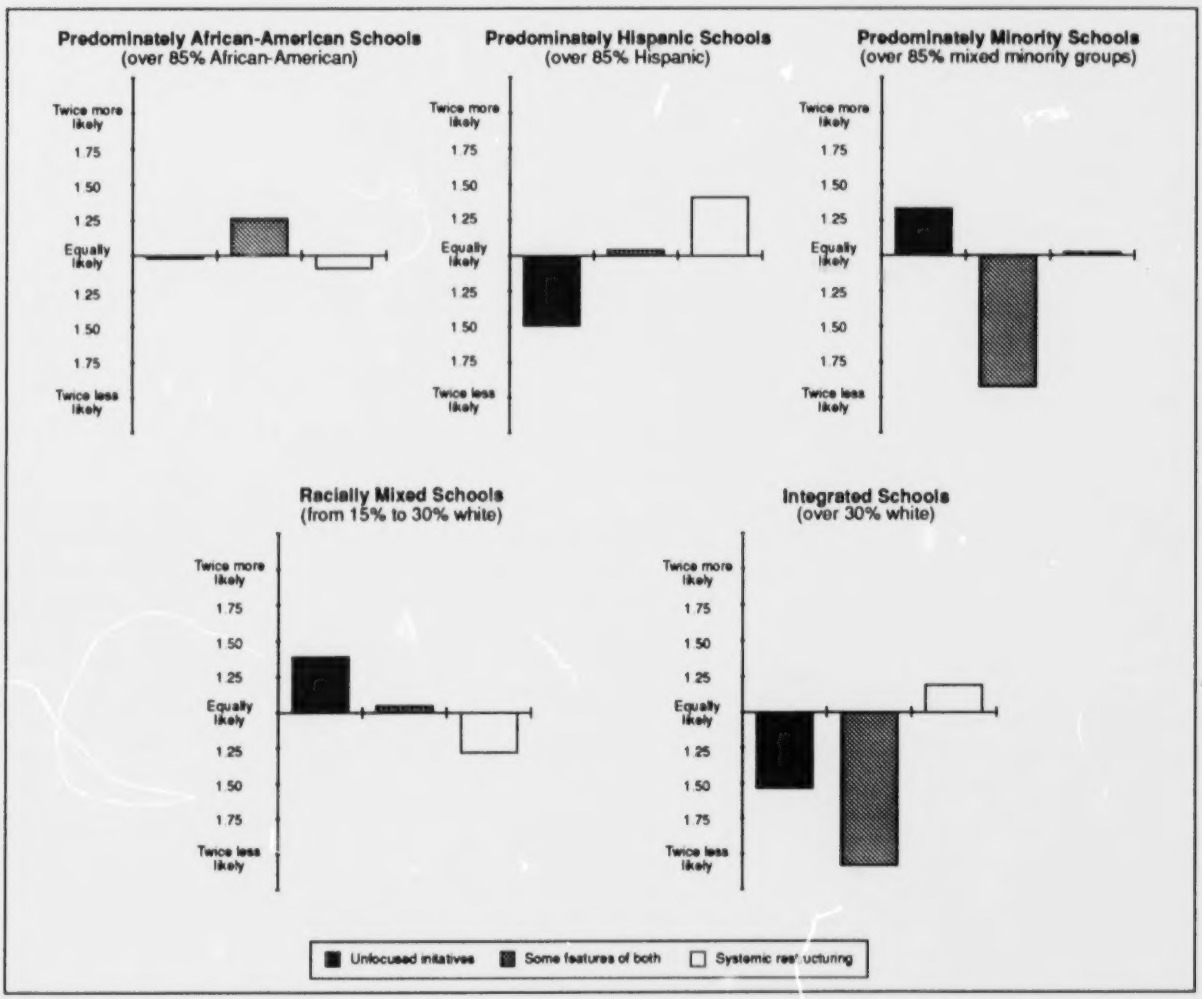
School size

Small schools (those with fewer than 350 students) are 1.25 times more likely to be pursuing a systemic approach to improvement compared to all other schools. They are also 1.25 times less likely to pursue an unfocused approach. Thus, we have further evidence of positive effects of small school size.

Racial Composition

The racial composition of the school is the only student background factor that differentiates school improvement approaches. Predominately African-American schools are 1.25 times more likely than other schools to have some features of both unfocused and systemic approaches. Predominately Hispanic schools, in contrast, are less likely than others to have an unfocused approach and more likely to be pursuing a systemic agenda. Again, we find

School Improvement Approaches and School Racial Composition

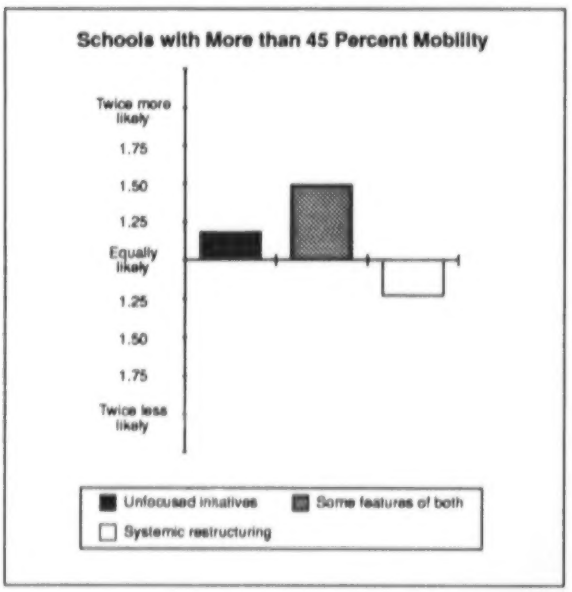


evidence of a particularly favorable set of reform outcomes in predominately Hispanic schools. Integrated schools display a pattern similar to that of the Hispanic schools except for a strong underrepresentation in the "some features of both" category. The more racially heterogeneous schools ("predominately minority" and "racially mixed") are more likely to have an unfocused approach to school improvement. Since they are also more likely to have adversarial politics, we have further evidence that schools with a diverse minority composition have a somewhat less favorable set of reform outcomes.

Student Mobility

One-fourth of the Chicago elementary schools have a mobility rate of over 45 percent. These schools seek to educate a transient student population with a changing parent community. Not surprisingly, these schools are more likely to be unfocused or mixed in their school improvement approach and less likely to follow a systemic agenda.

School Improvement Approaches and High Mobility Schools



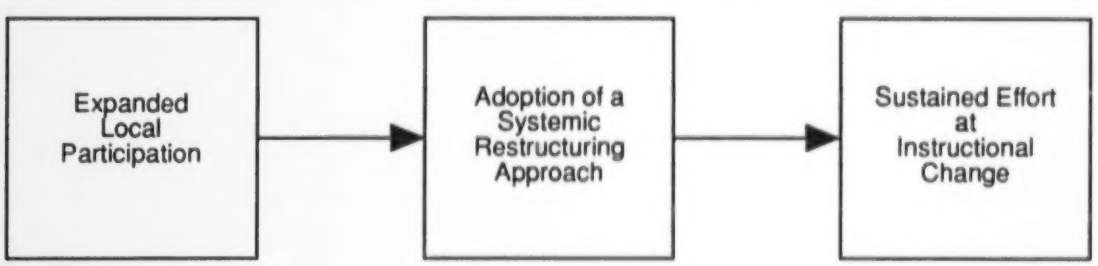
V. Testing the Basic Logic of the Chicago School Reform Act

Using the composite indicators developed to classify schools in terms of their school politics and school improvement types, we formally tested the validity of the "means-ends" linkage assumed in the Chicago School Reform Act (PA 85-1418). Does enhanced local participation lead to systemic restructuring efforts and sustained attention to instructional improvement?

Politics and School Improvement

We anticipated three salient connections based on results from the case-study synthesis project. The connections were validated by statistical analyses of Consortium survey data on the entire school system.

Key Links in Chicago's School Reform


Expanded Local Participation
Adoption of a Systemic Restructuring Approach
Sustained Effort at Instructional Change

1. **Adversarial politics inhibits systemic restructuring efforts and leads to unfocused approaches.**

This connection is based on the observation that sustained conflict about power tends to dominate the activity of those involved, and consequently, diminishes the school community's ability to engage in meaningful improvement efforts. Of the schools classified as having adversarial politics, over 80 percent report unfocused approaches to school improvement. Given the extent of conflict present in these schools as reported by principals and teachers over a two year period, it is difficult to imagine how systemic efforts involving wide participation and discussion could be possible.

2. **Consolidated principal power will also tend to inhibit systemic improvement efforts and lead to unfocused approaches.**

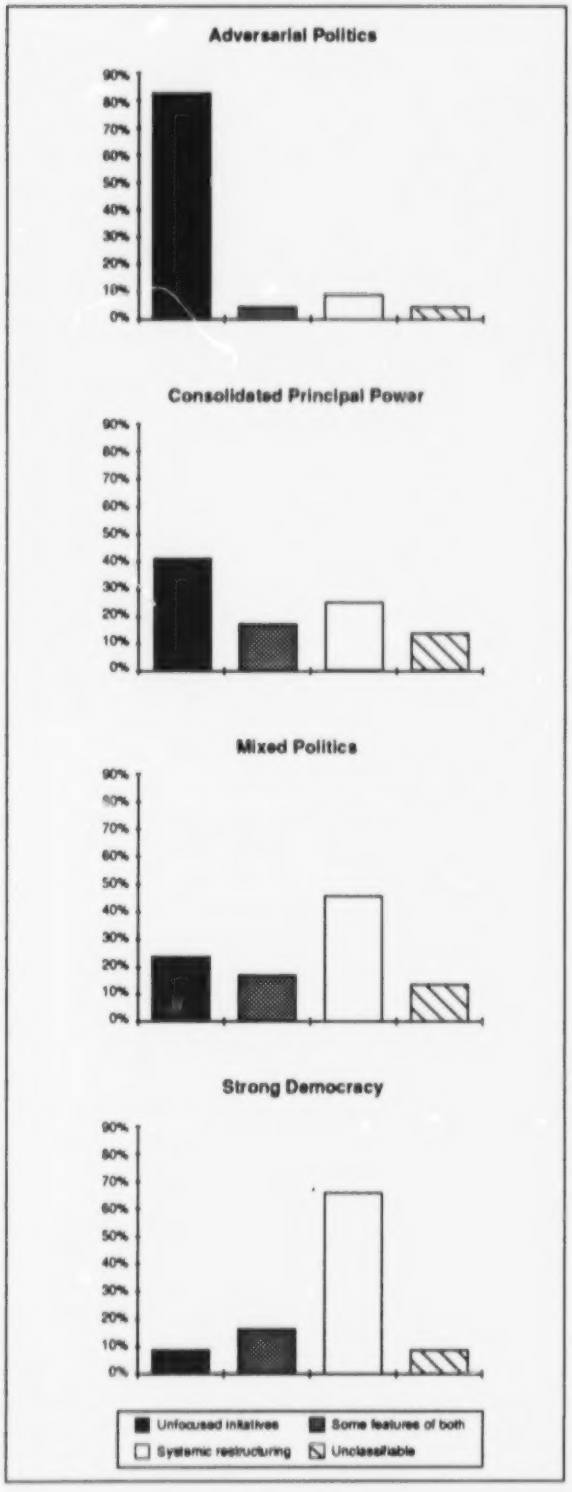
The statistical analyses also support this proposition, although not as strongly. In schools where principals "run the show," teachers and parents tend to remain largely uninvolved in school reform and engage in little collective discussion about change. Without this broad involvement, systemic improvements are less likely to occur. Even well-intentioned principals cannot reform a school by themselves. Among the schools with consolidated principal power, 43 percent report unfocused school improvement efforts. Another 18 percent of the schools report some features of both unfocused and systemic efforts.

3. **Schools governed by strong democracy are more likely to indicate systemic improvement efforts.**

This connection suggests that a political practice that engages a broad base of people who have a stake in the local school and who sustain discussion about educational issues can create valuable social resources to support systemic restructuring efforts. Of the schools with strong democratic politics, by far the greatest number, 66 percent, show systemic improvement efforts. An additional 16 percent show at least some features of systemic improvement efforts. In contrast, only 9 percent of the strong democracies indicate unfocused school improvements.

Taken in total, these relationships lend strong support to the first link assumed by Chicago school reform: Enhanced democratic participation can be an effective lever for systemic educational change.

School Politics and Approaches to School Improvement



School Politics and School Improvement: Number of Schools Affected

School Politics	Approaches to School Improvement			
	Unfocused	Some Features of Both	Systemic	Unclassifiable
Adversarial	30	2	2	2
Consolidated Power	73	30	44	24
Mixed Politics	22	16	42	13
Strong Democracy	11	21	82	11

— — — Politics tend to block systemic approaches to improvement (135 schools).

——— Consolidatd principal authority; systemic improvement approach (44 schools).

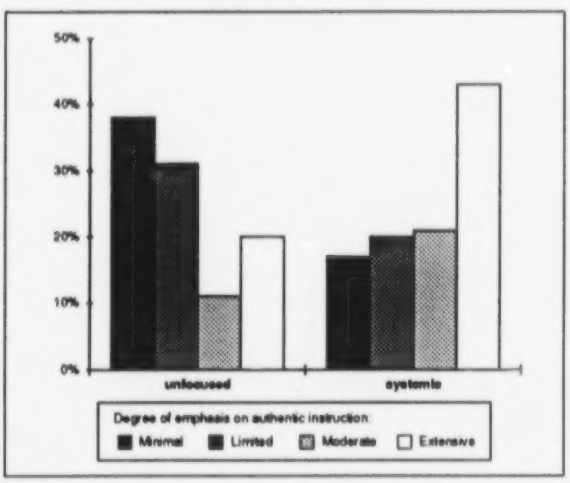
-------- Some democratic politics with unfocused approach to improvement (49 schools).

—·— Some democratic politics and some systemic improvement (145 schools).

*These numbers include only schools that had an average IGAP of less than 235 in spring 1989.

We note that 26 percent of the consolidated power schools report systemic improvement efforts. We had expected this connection to be more limited. Three possibilities may account for these findings. First, in every indicator system there is some measurement error that causes misclassification. Less-than-candid responses on the school surveys will tend to lead to a more favorable classification than the school deserves. Second, some of these may be schools in transition to the strong democracy/systemic reform category, and the data reports may be uneven as a result. Third, there may be an alternative route to systemic reform when strong paternal or maternal school leaders use the deference accorded them to catalyze organizational change. This strikes us as possible, although it was not something we observed in any of the school sites in the case-study synthesis project.

School Improvement Approaches and Authentic Instruction



School Improvement and Instructional Change

The Consortium's principal survey contains some information about efforts to improve classroom instruction. Several items in this group inquired about practices associated with "authentic learning," such as deep engagement of students in subject matter, making students active participants in the learning process, and assessment that emphasizes student production of knowledge.[22] Schools with the two different improvement approaches vary significantly on these items. Sixty-four percent of the systemic schools report a moderate or extensive use of authentic learning practices. In contrast, only 31 percent of the schools in the unfocused group report similar emphasis on authentic instruction.[23]

The principals' survey also inquired about the use of innovative teaching and curricular approaches, including the use of cooperative learning groups. Over one-fourth of the systemic schools report that almost all students participate in such activities. For unfocused schools, the comparable figure is only six percent. In fact, 60 percent of the unfocused schools

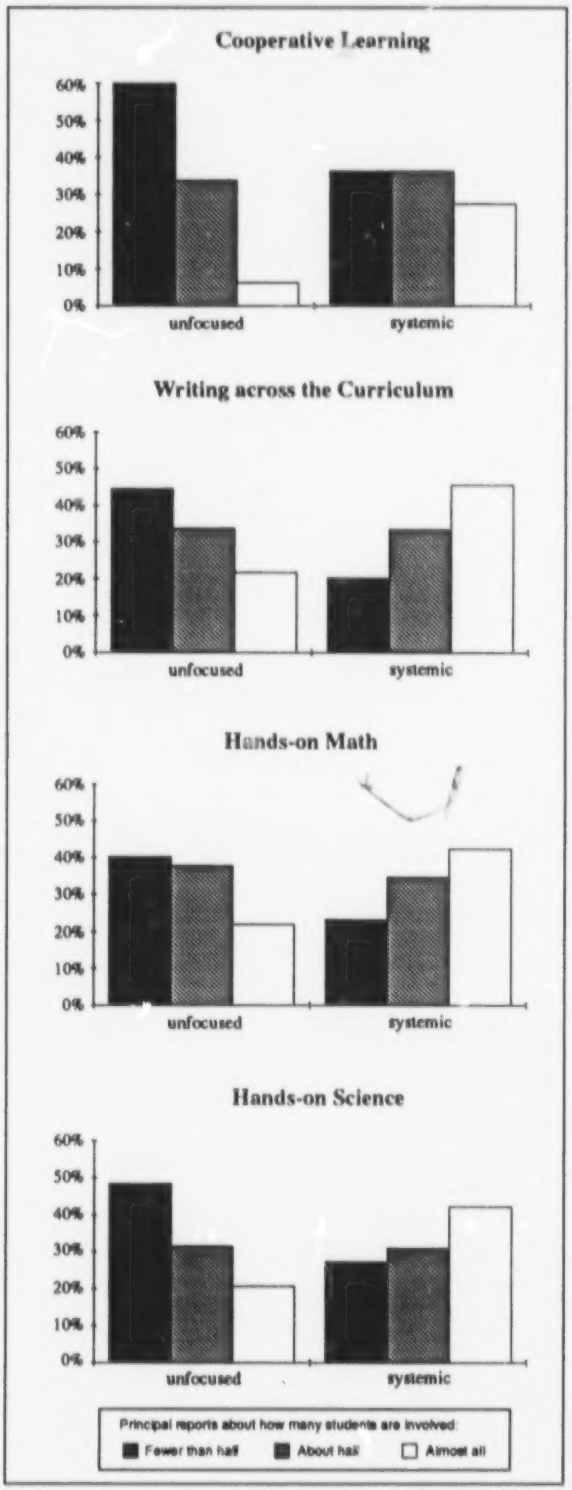
report that fewer than half of their students experience cooperative learning. (This was the lowest response available to principals on the questionnaire.)

Another principals' survey item inquired about writing across the curriculum. Again, the differences between the systemic and unfocused schools are quite stark. Forty-six percent of the systemic schools indicate writing across the curriculum for all students; the corresponding percentage in unfocused schools is only 22 percent. The use of "hands-on" math and science in classrooms also differed. Forty-two percent of the systemic schools report hands-on math for all their students while only 22 percent of the unfocused schools do so. In addition, most systemic schools broadly utilize hands-on science instruction. Only 27 percent of these schools report that fewer than half of their students are involved in such activities. In contrast, 49 percent of the unfocused schools indicate such limited use.

On balance, the presence of innovative practices does not ensure greater student learning in systemic schools than in the unfocused schools. Innovative practices take time and require substantial support to be implemented properly. Schools are still relatively inexperienced in developing these new approaches, and the "book" is still very open on the ultimate consequences for students.

This caveat notwithstanding, these analyses support the claim that systemic restructuring fosters instructional change. Thus, the second key link assumed in the Chicago reform legislation— between the adoption of a systemic restructuring approach and a sustained effort at instructional improvement— is also affirmed.

School Improvement Approaches and Adoption of "Best" Instructional Practices



Impact on the Initially High-Achieving Schools

Our primary focus has been on those schools whose standardized achievement scores were significantly below national norms prior to reform (low-achieving schools). We also looked at how reform has affected the other 14 percent of elementary schools that were near or above national norms prior to reform (high-achieving schools). These high-achieving schools prior to reform are quite different from the rest of the system. They educate a decidedly more advantaged and stable population of students. For example, only two percent of the high-achieving schools have over 90 percent low-income students; the comparable statistics for the low-achieving group is 60 percent. Similarly, only two percent of high-achieving schools have a mobility rate of over 45 percent (versus 25 percent of the low-achieving schools). High-achieving schools are also more likely to have an integrated student body, and are smaller in size. Thirty-two percent have fewer than 350 students; only 10 percent of low-achieving schools are this small.

A first question in regard to high-achieving schools is whether there is any evidence that reform has hurt them. A key consideration in this respect is the incidence of adversarial politics. Only two percent of the high-achieving schools can be classified into this category, which is substantially less than for low-achieving group.

In fact, school reform appears to be helping these schools. The high-achieving schools are more likely to report strong democratic politics (45 percent as compared to 29 percent for low-achieving schools). Similarly these schools are overwhelmingly pursuing a systemic agenda (76 percent) as opposed to 40 percent for low-achieving schools.

In general, high-achieving schools confront less severe school community problems and historically have tended to attract some of the better teachers in the system. Thus, as reform began, they had a greater reservoir of human and social resources. This has apparently helped to facilitate the emergence of strong democratic practices and helped schools to focus their talents and energies on systematic change.

In conclusion, there is no evidence that the higher achieving schools have been "harmed" by school reform. The majority, in fact, display positive approaches in both their school politics and school improvement. The greater local autonomy afforded by reform appears to have been seized by these schools and well used.

VI. A Closer Look at the Experiences of Actively Restructuring Schools

Background

This past spring, the Consortium decided to take a closer look at six of the most actively restructuring schools in Chicago. The experiences of each of these schools over the past three years are complex and varied. All are rich in the particulars of their school communities—including special issues and concerns, personalities, and distinctive resources. In our first analysis of the field reports, we focused on what these schools have in common: the strong themes that characterize development, the collective sense among school participants about what they have accomplished so far, and what still remains to be addressed.[24]

The Unfolding of Reform

The Local School Council's Role

Arguably, the single most important activity of the LSC has been to decide whether to retain the original principal or to select a new one. In each of the six Experiences of Actively Restructuring Schools (EARS), the LSC endorsed a person committed to students and parents in their community. The LSC's effective exercise of its responsibility to evaluate and select a school principal has played a central role in catalyzing the improvement efforts underway at these schools.

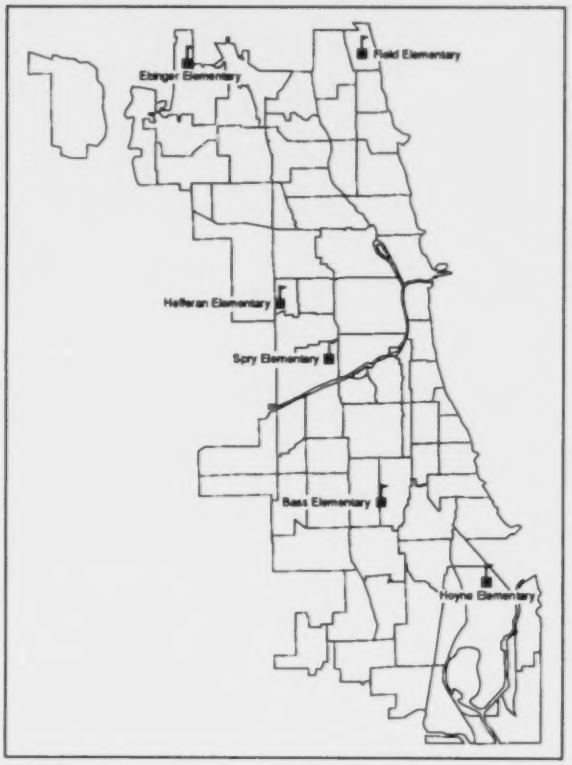
How the EARS Study Was Conducted

The Consortium assembled a team of three or four researchers from area universities to visit a diverse group of actively restructuring schools. During the visits to each school, we interviewed the principal, Local School Council and Professional Personnel Advisory Committee chairs and other selected school leaders. We talked to teachers and students and spent considerable time observing in a broad cross-section of classrooms. We also conducted focus groups with LSCs and PPACs. In total, we logged between 15 to 20 days of conversations and observations in each school.

Once a principal was selected (or retained, as at Bass and Ebinger), the LSCs tended to see their role as one of supporting their new leaders.[25] The LSCs have taken an active role in efforts to improve parent and community involvement with the school, to encourage parents to support children's learning at home, to enhance and maintain the physical plant, and to improve order and safety both inside and outside of school. More generally, they have helped to focus attention on local needs; on some occasions, they have offered creative and efficient local solutions to those needs.[26]

On issues of school improvement planning and budgeting, and particularly on instructional initiatives, however, it is the principals and teacher leaders who are offering direction. To be sure, there are many conversations in the LSC about instruction and the need to improve it. And these are real discussions; the LSC is not just a puppet.

EARS Fieldwork Sites



Nevertheless, it is generally clear that the direction for these improvement initiatives starts with the professional staff.

In sum, the Local School Councils in the EARS schools are vital institutions. They are definitely an important part of the ongoing discussion about the improvement of the school community, and they help

Descriptive Information on EARS Sites

School Name	*Community*	*Enrollment*	*Grades*	*% Afrcan-American*	*% Hispanic*	*% Asian*	*% White*	*% Limited English Proficiency*	*% Low Income*	*Composite IGAP 1989*
Bass	Englewood	777	P, K-8	100	0	0	0	0	97	163
Ebinger	Edison Park	305	K-8	7	36	4	53	10	44	212
Field	Rogers Park	1150	P, K-8	43	37	10	10	31	69	210
Hefferan	Austin	652	K-8	100	0	0	0	0	95	169
Hoyne	Calumet	221	K-8	98	2	0	0	1	53	246
Spry	South Lawndale	1357	K-8	3	96	0	1	51	100	174

The Successful Unfolding of Chicago School Reform
Key Elements

1. Active Local School Council Role

- Select a principal committed to students and parents and then support this principal's efforts
- Take an active role in efforts to improve parent and community involvement, to enhance physical plant, and to improve order and safety
- Endorse initiatives by principals and teachers for instructional improvement

2. Facilitative, Inclusive Principal Leadership

- Make their past experience in the system now work for their schools
- Reach out to both parents and staff to get more involved
- Articulate a vision-in-outline of how "this can be a good school for **our** kids and **our** families"
- Encourage sustained conversations and activity among both parents and faculty that further develops the vision
- Committed to quality standards and willing to engage conflict to advance them
- Derive moral authority from public rhetoric: "Everything we do is for the kids"

3. Principals' Key First Steps: A New Image for the School and a Renewed Sense of Agency

- Become highly visible in the school and in the community
- Focus on identifying pressing problems that can be solved quickly
- Use new symbols (e.g., school logo, stationery, uniforms) to distinguish the "new school" and mark individual membership
- Offer a distinctive voice, a broader conception of the school's responsibility for children, their families, and the local community
- Frequently remind both parents and teachers, "Look at what we have accomplished . . . together we can make this place better."

4. Longer-Term Focus: Strengthening the Technical Core

- Hire quality new faculty
- "Encourage" some teachers to leave
- Build a team compatible with the evolving vision of the school
- Support individual teacher initiative on instructional improvement
- Move toward more sustained, school-wide staff development
- Promote professional community among the faculty (providing time and a place to meet, a committee structure for offering input, access to resources and authority to act, and support for effective group process)

5. Strong External Connections to Support School Development

- Principals have ties to professional networks and key associates to support their work
- Teachers have numerous connections to local colleges and universities for staff development and instructional improvement
- Schools have established institutional ties to support their development including ties to local social services, recreation facilities, and businesses

6. Strategic Use of Discretionary Resources

- Strong coupling of budget and school improvement plans
- An initial focus on environmental order (e.g., improving safety and cleaning up the school), replenishing basic school supplies and instructional materials, and some add-on programs
- Over time, increasing allocations for core instructional improvement

out where they can. They are certainly not, however, "telling professionals what to do."

Principal Leadership

The key feature that stands out as most important in EARS schools is principal leadership. All have developed good working relations with their LSCs, grounded in a sensitivity to local needs and a commitment to an inclusive process with open communication across the school community.

EARS principals share only one background characteristic— all had prior administrative experience, including a stint at Pershing Road. They indicated in our interviews that the knowledge, experience, and personal contacts gained through this work were important resources that they were now using for their schools.

When we shift our attention to observations about leadership style and personality, the base of commonalities among the six principals expands significantly. Prior to reform, it was widely assumed that principals were in good standing if they kept the "lid on" affairs in their own building (i.e., if few problems bubbled up to the district and central office), and if they followed the major dictates and initiatives coming down from the central office. This vertical orientation, where principals looked up to the central administration for direction and approval, has been reoriented under PA 85-1418 toward a much more horizontal focus on the ideas, concerns, and initiative of parents, teachers, students, and community members.

Teachers, LSC members, and students all told us about the commitment and compassion of these new school leaders. These principals' enthusiasm, optimism, and passion for improvement draw people into the school and bring life to its mission. Each principal, in his or her own way, articulates a vision-in-outline of how "this can be a good school for **our** kids and **our** families." Many of the principals' everyday social interactions, both in the school and in the community, involve reminding people of what the school is about. They discuss the kinds of intellectual and social experiences that are good for children, the kinds of adults who make up a good faculty, the ways that teachers should relate to students and their parents—in general the kind of community institution this school should be. They invite conversation about each of these ideas. They are willing to articulate a strong stance and to engage in conflict if that is what it will take to move the school forward. Organizational change is not easy, but these principals are unwavering in their core beliefs, and they intend to persist.

Principals' First Steps: Image and Agency

Often in marked contrast to their predecessors, EARS principals are highly visible in their school communities. These contacts provide them with opportunities to communicate personally their "vision-in-outline" for the school. They also get to know people and become familiar with their issues and concerns, both personal and school related. Some individual problems can be remedied quickly and provide an early signal "that things here are different now." Other concerns may take longer to address. Nevertheless, by being open to people and new ideas, these principals signal a commitment to an inclusive school politics. This is an important first step in moving the school from centralized bureaucratic control toward becoming a more broadly participative local institution.

EARS principals also attend to the symbolic facets of organizational life, using them to promote a sense of membership in a school community. They go to some lengths to mark their school as a distinctive place, possibly with school tee shirts, jackets, or uniforms. They might promote a school logo, buy new stationery, or have business cards printed for the faculty. In the past, a highly centralized system deliberately sought to enforce uniformity in the schools. Now these schools seek their own distinctiveness, their own organizational image. Through these symbolic facets, EARS principals are trying to create a sense of affiliation and eventually a collective ownership and responsibility among students, parents, and teachers toward this school as "our place."

We note that each principal has a distinctive voice. Each speaks to a particular vision for **his or her own** school community. At Hefferan, for example, it is a commitment to nurture and care for children in the two square blocks surrounding the school, to shape their will to learn and to educate them all. At Spry, the school is to become a central institution of a strengthened community life that expands civic participation and reclaims the public spaces of the neighborhood from drugs, gangs, and violence. At Ebinger, it is a constant focus on quality in everything they do and in involving everyone in the process.

Despite these different visions, however, there are two key commonalities. First is the changing character of the school's relationship with parents and the local community. One notices strong encouragement for an expanded parent presence in the school, a broader conception of the school's responsibility to care for children (as well as to educate them), and the push for the school to be responsive to the local community.

Second, at the core is a commitment that "everything we do is for the kids." This acts as a unifying force promoting a politics of common interest in school improvement.

Taken together, these principals' actions and words encourage an increased engagement by teachers, parents, students, and community members with the school's improvement efforts. All six of the EARS principals are seeking to instill a sense of agency—especially among parents and teachers—by reminding, "look at what we have already accomplished." In the past, both groups often had been alienated from the local school. They had little reason to believe that they could make a difference or that anyone would really care if they tried. Now, EARS principals are engaged in a sustained, conscious effort to convince parents and teachers that "together we can make this place better."

Attacking the Technical Core

Enhancing the human resources of the school. These principals set a high priority on developing the human resources of the school. They employed a mix of three strategies: providing staff development of existing faculty; hiring quality new staff; and removing poor-quality teachers.

Prior to reform, faculty were usually assigned to schools by the central office, and most principals had relatively little influence in these decisions. The Chicago School Reform Act granted principals the right to select new teachers, an option each of the EARS schools has aggressively pursued. Some of the additional discretionary monies provided by reform have been used to create new positions and hire new faculty. Some staff were "encouraged" to leave, providing more opportunities to hire new people.

EARS principals spoke at some length about the attention given to the hiring process. The principals searched for good people to recruit to their schools, checked references and past teaching experiences, and described carefully crafted interview protocols. They saw themselves not just hiring a grade level teacher or a subject matter specialist, but rather building a faculty team compatible with the vision of school community that they sought to promote. Teachers had to be good at what they were supposed to teach, but they also had to care about the community and its children, to be able to act as positive role models, and to have broader interests that might engage students beyond the classroom. Personnel selection can be a powerful tool in guiding a faculty toward a more coherent vision of a school community. EARS principals are actively using this tool to restructure their schools. Here again their "vision-in-outline" for the school plays an important role in guiding action.

Complementing this attention to hiring good, new staff is enthusiastic support for enhancing the capacities of individual teachers. Encouraging teachers' professionalism represents another important aspect in their overall efforts to reform their schools. Discretionary resources are made available to cover workshop fees; classroom coverage is arranged if needed. Upon return to school, teachers are encouraged to talk to their colleagues about what they learned and how it might be relevant to their improvement efforts.

Increasingly, advocates for systemic reform are emphasizing efforts that engage whole segments of a school faculty (e.g., all the primary teachers, or all of the upper-grade teachers of mathematics) around a sustained program of teaching improvement in a particular subject matter.[27] Although we observed some of this, staff development even in these schools still primarily involves disconnected pockets of activity which do not yet reflect a coherent plan of school-wide instructional improvement.

It is important to set the current status of instructional improvement efforts in EARS schools within a larger organizational development perspective, however. Past research has shown that real school improvements have an evolutionary quality and rarely follow text-book formulations of strategic planning.[28] From this perspective, the plethora of individual activity serves an important purpose in the early mobilization for school restructuring. Along with new faculty, this individual staff development offers a conduit for introducing many new ideas into the school. Some of these ideas may flourish and bring depth to the school vision; most, however, will probably just disappear. Even so, through these activities faculty are working toward new norms of information seeking and constant improvement. Thus, the principals' encouraging faculty to go out and pursue new ideas represents another important aspect of initiating the restructuring process.

The third strand of human resource development involves "counseling out" weak staff. As principals entered their respective schools, they conveyed an openness to people and real interest in sharing authority for the school and its improvement. Although they accepted disagreement about ideas, they remained resolute about the standards of quality they expected. Those who fell short and were unwilling or unable to improve were "encouraged to leave." This encouragement took several forms. EARS principals have been highly visible in their schools and

in classrooms. Weak teachers were quickly put on notice that the teaching behind a closed classroom door is no longer the norm. Uneasy with this new scrutiny, some decided they would be happier elsewhere and looked for another teaching position. In some instances, principals might have changed a teacher to a less desirable assignment, another signal that "you might be happier elsewhere."

When such counseling fails, principals may initiate the E-3 process for faculty termination. They complained that this procedure is cumbersome and time consuming, and that they do not receive the support of the central office in the process. Fortunately, it is often not necessary to follow the process through to termination. A principal's signaling of resolve in this regard may be sufficient to encourage someone to leave. Moreover, this process has a ripple effect. As the weakest are counseled out, others are put on notice that the principal is serious about moving the school forward. Further, as new staff enter, camaraderie can grow around the emerging school vision. Peer pressure begins to form, and the faculty embraces new quality standards as their own.

In sum, human resource development has been a core concern in all of the EARS schools. To date at least, the main strategies for developing better teaching have been to hire better teachers and to counsel out the weakest members of the faculty. The EARS principals recognize, however, that more still needs to be done to improve classroom practice and to create more coherent instructional experiences for children.

Developing professional community. In addition to developing the capacities of individual teachers, the EARS schools have also directed considerable attention to promoting professional community. Traditional school organization fostered isolated teacher activity and provided few opportunities for shared work. In the EARS schools, time has been created for teachers to meet, places have been made available for them to congregate and talk, and responsibilities have been devolved to them.

Each of the EARS schools has developed specific committee structures to support teachers' greater engagement in organizational life. Since much of this activity occurs before and after school and on weekends, some school discretionary resources have been used to partially remunerate teachers for this extra work. Most faculty now participate in some manner. Although some committees work better than others, these structures provide extensive opportunities for faculty participation in school-based decision making which is seen as key to expanding ownership for the resulting plans. Interestingly, the

What Does It Mean for a Faculty to Be a Professional Community?

Increasingly, good schools are described as professional communities where staff share collective responsibility for student welfare. The idea of the whole school as a professional community continues to evolve. Here is one description of the key features of a whole school professional community being developed by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (Kruse and Louis, 1993).

In a professional community, there is:

- **Reflective dialogue**: Conversations occur about important educational issues or problems. A regular feature of these conversations involves the application of new knowledge to local problems.
- **De-privatization of practice**: Teachers engage both individually and collaboratively in examining their teaching behaviors. This open and public examination of practice is rooted in the desire to improve.
- **Collective focus on student learning**: In addition to a focus on materials and instructional techniques, there is sustained attention to tangible evidence of what students are actually learning. That is, an outcome orientation accompanies the emphasis on improvement of practice.
- **Collaboration:** School development activities have collective consequences. Collaboration goes beyond collegiality to mean shared work.
- **Shared norms/values**: Professional communities share beliefs about proper concern for students in and out of class. Faculty maintain that all students can learn and are of equal value; faculty share responsibility for student development beyond academic achievement; and they have an obligation to keep learning about teaching. Most generally, faculty share a commitment to being a professional community.

Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) is not the sole structure through which teachers can voice their views. Each school has evolved its own governance forms specific to its circumstances.

Teachers from all six EARS schools are quite aware of this emergent professional community. They indicated that they now have a good relationship with other faculty members or that their school provided "a cooperative environment," "camaraderie," or "a family-type atmosphere." Many said that teachers in their school work together, sharing ideas and materials, communicating, and cooperating. Many attributed this increase in cooperation and sharing to reform.

Much of the onus for initiating a professional community again falls on the principal. Prior to school reform, principals "ran their schools," in many cases in an autocratic fashion. It is not surprising that faculty in such schools were distrustful and suspicious. Thus, it falls to the principal to reorient the climate and create a sense of agency for teachers. A strong signal from the principal that things are "different now. For this school to improve, we must work together" is important to initiate the development of a professional community and to sustain it in its early phases. In such instances, principals have used the power of their role to expand professional participation and empower others.

External Connections to Support School Development

School restructuring is a difficult organizational task. Each EARS school has engaged an extensive array of connections to individual faculty at local colleges and universities, foundations, the business community, and resources within the central office to provide guidance and support for their organizational development efforts. In several cases, these connections have turned into long-term institutional ties that focus broadly on supporting development of the school community.

Most of the EARS principals have also established extensive supports for their work. Several have taken advantage of summer leadership programs and participate in one or more networks of CPS principals organized around the city. All have also formed their own personal connections to individuals in the school system—other principal colleagues and local faculty who provide both advice and support.

Teachers in EARS schools have also established numerous connections with various staff development and instructional improvement efforts at local colleges and universities. In the past, it was often very difficult for faculty in area colleges and universities to work with Chicago schools. A cumbersome centralized review and clearance process tended to discourage local initiatives. Interested university faculty often turned instead to nearby suburban school systems. Significant changes have occurred here in the last few years.

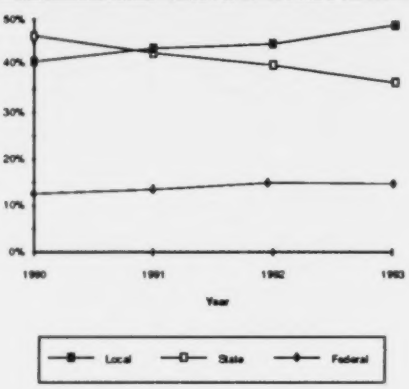
Each CPS school now operates within a diverse marketplace of staff and organizational development services. A substantial portion of EARS principals' time is spent brokering these various connections and acting as entrepreneurs for their schools. Some services are purchased with discretionary funds at full price from the for-profit market; others are often subsidized in part or in whole by foundation grants or core college and university funds. Responsibility for integrating these diverse offerings into a coherent system of instructional guidance falls largely on the shoulders of the principal and staff.

Strategic Use of Discretionary Resources

The new monies provided to schools as part of PA 85-1418 have played a key role in initiating reform. By transferring increasing amounts of state Chapter 1 funds to local schools to spend at their own discretion, a significant resource was made available to advance local school improvement efforts. These state Chapter 1 funds supplement federal Chapter 1 funds and other categorical funds received by many schools.

Depending on the number of low-income students served, schools vary considerably in the proportion of their budget they derive from discretionary sources. Among the six EARS schools,

Percentage of Chicago Public School Operating Revenues Coming from Local, State, and Federal Sources



While individual schools have benefitted from increased allocation of state Chapter 1 funds, the overall state funding to Chicago has declined in relative terms. In just three years, the state's "share" has dropped from 47 percent to 37 percent.

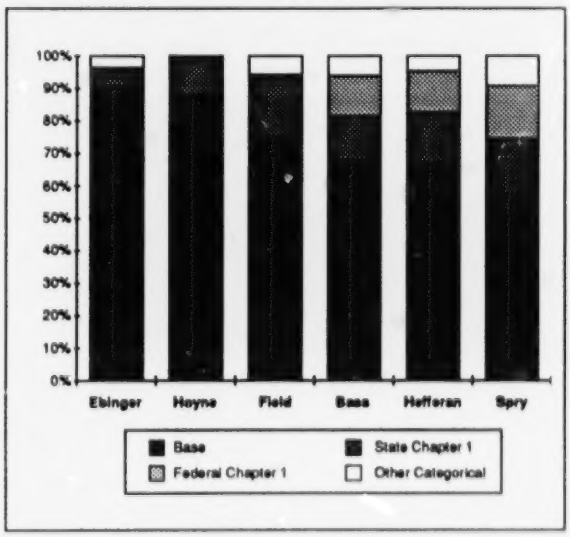
Fiscal Resources Redirected under PA 85-1418

- Placed a cap on central office administrative expenses.
- Introduced school-based budgeting process.
- Required that base funds be equitably allocated to schools.
- Increased discretionary revenues to schools with high percentages of disadvantaged students.

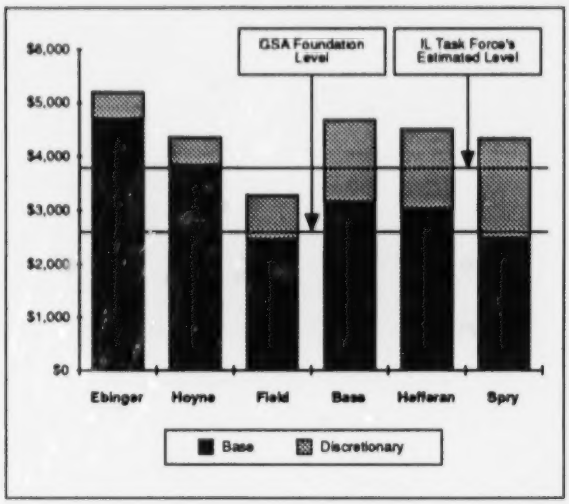
Spry receives the highest portion, 40 percent, from federal, state, and other categorical funds; Ebinger receives the lowest portion, less than 10 percent. Translating these percentages into per-pupil expenditures, in 1993 Ebinger and Hoyne received a little over $400 per pupil from these sources; Field received $700; Bass and Hefferan received about $1,300; and Spry received over $1,600 per student.

Although the level of discretionary funding is substantial, schools have had to dip into some of these monies to meet basic education costs. The display "1993 Per-Pupil Allocations by Funding Source" compares the base funding for EARS schools against two different standards for minimum per-pupil funding. The first is the 1992-93 General State Aid (GSA) per-pupil foundation of $2,600, which is the amount guaranteed for each public school student in Illinois. The second is the minimum level of per-pupil spending needed for a basic education—$3,898—according to the Illinois Task Force on School Finance. The base funding at both Field and Spry does not reach the $2,600 standard, and only Ebinger and Hoyne have enough base funding to surpass the Illinois Task Force's minimum level. Thus, four out of six of these schools need to draw on their discretionary funds for basic school purposes, such as textbooks and art and music programs.

Percentage of 1993 Budgets Coming from Base and Discretionary Funds



1993 Per-Pupil Allocations by Funding Source



Use of federal Chapter 1 funds. These funds, a major discretionary resource in three of the six schools, continue to be used as they were prior to reform (largely for staff salaries for pull-out programs and self-contained remedial classes). Little reallocation has occurred to advance these schools' improvement efforts. Principals complained that Chicago's slowness in permitting whole-school Chapter 1 programs has constrained their action. We also note that reallocation of these funds can be potentially problematic for a school because these monies currently support specific staff who may have been in the school for some time. In other words, reallocation can require personnel changes.

Use of state Chapter 1 and other categorical funds. EARS schools budget roughly 60 to 80 percent of their categorical funding each year for human resources. This includes additional teachers and teachers' aides to reduce class size, teachers for after-school programs, and specialized professionals such as social workers and psychologists. Other large

categories of expenses include textbooks, equipment and supplies, computers, and staff development.

Over the past three years, budgeting decisions in EARS schools reflect school leaders' efforts to improve the school environment, to attack immediate problems in the school community (e.g., safety), and to begin to address human resource needs and instructional change. Generally, allocations flow from the School Improvement Plan (SIP). At Hefferan, for example, to meet the systemwide goal of raising student achievement, school leaders decided to incorporate computer assisted learning (for which they purchased a computer network) and invested in staff development. Teachers have received in-service training on writing across the curriculum from the Illinois Writing Project, whole language instruction, classroom management, assertive discipline, cooperative learning, and the IBM Write to Read program. They also invested in new initiatives in science, foreign language, and creative arts.

In implementing its School Improvement Plan, Ebinger began by replenishing material needs, such as bookshelves, tables and chairs, and computers. (Ebinger also incorporates computer-assisted instruction in reading, writing and language arts, mathematics, and reasoning.) In 1992, they began to shift their emphasis away from equipment, budgeting more for textbooks, math manipulatives, and instructional materials for a variety of other subjects. In 1993, they continue to budget for instructional materials, but have augmented allocations for staff development. In fact, this pattern could be seen in four out of the six schools.

In general, state Chapter 1 funds have brought significant resources to these schools to help finance reform. Although there are constraints on these funds, the schools have found ways to link spending to their SIPs and to provide the school and the teachers with the tools needed to bring about systemic improvements. They have also played a very important role in regenerating the school's image and in creating a renewed sense of agency among local participants. Without these funds, it is hard to envision how the progress observed to date possibly could have occurred.

Views from the Classroom

Ultimately, change efforts initiated by LSCs, principals, and teachers should directly or indirectly affect instruction and children's learning. To examine the nature of teaching, the social relations in the classroom, and opportunities for student learning, we observed reading and mathematics lessons in the first and third grades and social studies and mathematics in the sixth and eighth grades. We observed 40 teachers in a total of 52 lessons.

In about three-quarters of the classrooms across all six schools, students were actively involved in the learning process. These classrooms were comfortable places; teachers had established open and supportive relationships with their students, and classroom activities were often quite spirited. With a few exceptions, students behaved well.

Looking across a range of grade levels and subjects, we found a wide variety of classroom activities. Some of these were responsive to students' linguistic background and culture; others built on students' experiences and incorporated multicultural understandings. Hands-on activity occurred in all schools, and some teachers organized students into cooperative learning groups. We also observed the

An Example of Classroom Teaching

We observed a developmental class which was specially designed for kindergarten, first grade, or even second grade students who were not yet "ready" for primary level instruction in reading and mathematics. The lesson began with counting by twos, fives, etc. on number lines that surround the room. The teacher quickly moved into a discussion of date, time, calendar, weather, and seasons. She asked questions like, "What would come next?" "How could we write that?" "Will someone put that on the board?" Moving to the next activity, the teacher took out a box of pictures. Students selected a picture, stated the letter the word starts with, and placed the picture in a pocket with the same letter on the front, which was located on a free-standing board. A little later, a group of upper grade special education students and their teacher joined the class. Students were organized into five groups with older and younger students mixed together. Each group represented a vowel sound. As the teacher played a song on the tape recorder, the children listened for their vowel sound. When they heard it, they stood and repeated the sound.

During the interview afterwards, we learned that these two teachers had been working together for a month or so. This kind of collaboration is not typical of most schools, but it is now encouraged in this school.

inclusion of special education students in regular classroom life. For the most part, we saw thoughtful, didactic instruction occasionally mixed with more innovative methods.

In the remaining quarter of the classrooms, the teaching and learning activities were more troublesome. In some cases the academic content was minimal and fragmented, and the instruction was uninspired, monotonous, and dreary. In these lessons, there was virtually no attempt to relate content to students' own experiences. Students participated dutifully, but there was little energy or spark in their responses. In a handful of classrooms, teachers dealt harshly with the students, publicly rebuking them for the smallest infraction. In general, many EARS schools have taken significant steps towards redesigning instruction, but these efforts are still new and have not reached all teachers.

Teachers' Views

Virtually all of the 40 EARS teachers interviewed in the six schools expressed positive feelings about school reform. Most felt that reform generally, and the School Improvement Plan (SIP) more specifically, had a positive effect on their school and on their teaching. They described this impact in a variety of ways: a change in focus toward new or more clearly articulated goals; more resources and/or materials; and new or additional programs. They sensed increased cooperation, communication and teamwork between teachers; more opportunities for input; and increased parental or community involvement. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that they also reported improved teacher morale. Many teachers credited the principal with bringing about these changes.

Teachers generally indicated that they had been involved in developing their SIP and that this was a positive experience. Most often, this involvement took place on design teams or other planning committees. Several teachers indicated that involvement in planning the SIP was instrumental in empowering teachers and the community.

A key indication of teachers' sense of personal well-being is how they feel about their jobs. When asked what it's like to teach in their school, they spoke in glowing terms about their work, their colleagues and their children.

Teachers' Comments on Reform

"The school improvement thing has done a lot to improve teachers' perceptions of themselves and how effective they are in school. You look all over the school and you will see that there are things in place that were not there before, and they are entirely a consequence of the participation."

"I am seeing a lot of changes being made. I think they are good. I feel in some cases like someone who has just started teaching for the first time. I am really excited, I am, about the changes. I truly believe that they are for the best."

"Alive! Movement, movement forward, certainly not movement backward. A freshness in the air. There is a sense of cooperation."

Teachers' Comments on their Work

"Well, I love it here. I do. I enjoy working here, with people that I have been working with. I mean, everyone is very cooperative and, being new here, everyone is very helpful to me. And the children are wonderful. I mean, I really like it here, so I have no complaints whatsoever."

"I think that sometimes it's trying, trying at times, very challenging, very intriguing, motivating. . . . But most of all I think it's very rewarding. I think that it's a very positive atmosphere."

"The most rewarding thing I have ever done in my life. . . . I never have had so much joy as seeing these kids work. . . . It is just a fantastic joy and an honor."

Students' Views

Students' Social Development

Generally, the field staff were struck by the pleasant and cheerful demeanor of students observed in the hallways and classrooms. Of course, there were some incidents of teachers disciplining students and peers not getting along, but overall we found the children to be easygoing, friendly, good-natured, and happy.[29]

Students emphasized that their school provides a "safe haven" for those who live in neighborhoods where gang activity and drug dealing run rampant. Students at Bass, Hefferan, Spry, and Field were especially vocal about the dangerous streets they walk

on the way to and from school. A significant number of these students mentioned they had witnessed incidents of violent crime and drug dealing in their neighborhoods and remarked that they do not even go outside to play after school or in the summertime because it is too dangerous.

Students' Comments on Safety

"There's a lot of stuff happening, so we can't feel safe in the neighborhood. People fighting and people shooting. Gangs everywhere . . . outside they sell drugs and all that stuff . . . but it's sure safe up in the school."

"Our parents won't let us go outside because all these gangs are outside, and they don't want us to get hurt. And we don't want ourselves to get hurt, so we want more police, more security [in our neighborhood]."

"There's a lot of gangbangers around the house. There is not problems around [school]. Around my house it's like every day you hear on the news that this person got shot by this place. Most of the places are close to my house."

Students spoke with appreciation of their teachers who "really listen" to their problems and anxieties about growing up. Some teachers encourage them to write daily journals about their experiences, and others offer personal support or see that troubled children get help from the school's staff.

We also found that children generally felt comfortable with and supportive of their peers. One feature contributing to the generally positive social relations at the EARS schools is the wide range of extracurricular activities and after-school programs available. Students clearly enjoy participating in these activities. These programs also provide another context for positive adult-student relations as well as occasions for students to interact and cooperate with peers from different backgrounds.

Students' Academic Development

The vast majority of sixth and eighth grade students interviewed reported that their teachers had high expectations for students. At the same time, students felt that teachers really cared about them and gave them extra help to succeed. Students also indicated that they were rewarded for their academic success. Some teachers called students' parents to tell them about their child's achievements. All EARS schools have honor roll lists prominently displayed in their hallways, ceremonies to recognize high-achieving students, and classroom bulletin boards displaying exemplary student work.

Students' Comments on Their Teachers

"[The teacher] gets upset if you don't do the best that you can. She says, 'I know you can do better. Now look at these grades and stop fooling around.'"

"[My teachers] expect you to be the best that you can be. And keep trying as hard as you can. If you don't, then they push you."

"I try every day because she's always encouraging us. We have all kinds of class slogans, like we never say 'I can't.' We always say 'I can.' And she says that no one is dumb. My teacher will actually come and tutor and maybe have a conversation with you, because she knows you're not working hard."

The majority of students interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with their schools. They appreciate the support and caring they receive from adults. They understand that academic success is valued, and they hold these values as their own. The overall school climate is characterized by a commitment to learning. Together these factors

Students' Comments on Their Schools

"I tell my parents what we did here in school every day, and I tell them that I am okay in this school and I don't want to change schools."

"This school is very nice. I really like this school very much. I wouldn't like to change. My mom was thinking to change me, put me in a private school, but I don't want that. I just want to stay in this school."

"Like the old principal had some strict rules, but like he didn't follow it, though with [the new principal] they do. This [new] principal is better, much better. Because our school has gotten more better, you know. There's no gang problems no more. Nobody fights like with other people. They don't bring guns, no knives . . . And the teachers are making it a good school. It's getting better and better and better here."

combine to provide a challenging and caring context for urban children.

Short-Term Impact of Reform on Students

Student Engagement

One of the first areas in which we might expect to see some positive impact of reform in actively restructuring schools is improvement in student engagement. In addition to the student testimony already described, we have also looked at some possible quantitative indicators.

In principle, as schools strengthen their environmental order, they become more engaging places for students. Attendance should improve. With a heightened sense of membership in a valued school community, mobility should also decline as parents make rational calculations that it is worth some effort to keep their children in this school. Similarly, assuming that the school has some excess capacity, we might even expect an increase in enrollment as information begins to circulate around the community that the school is improving.

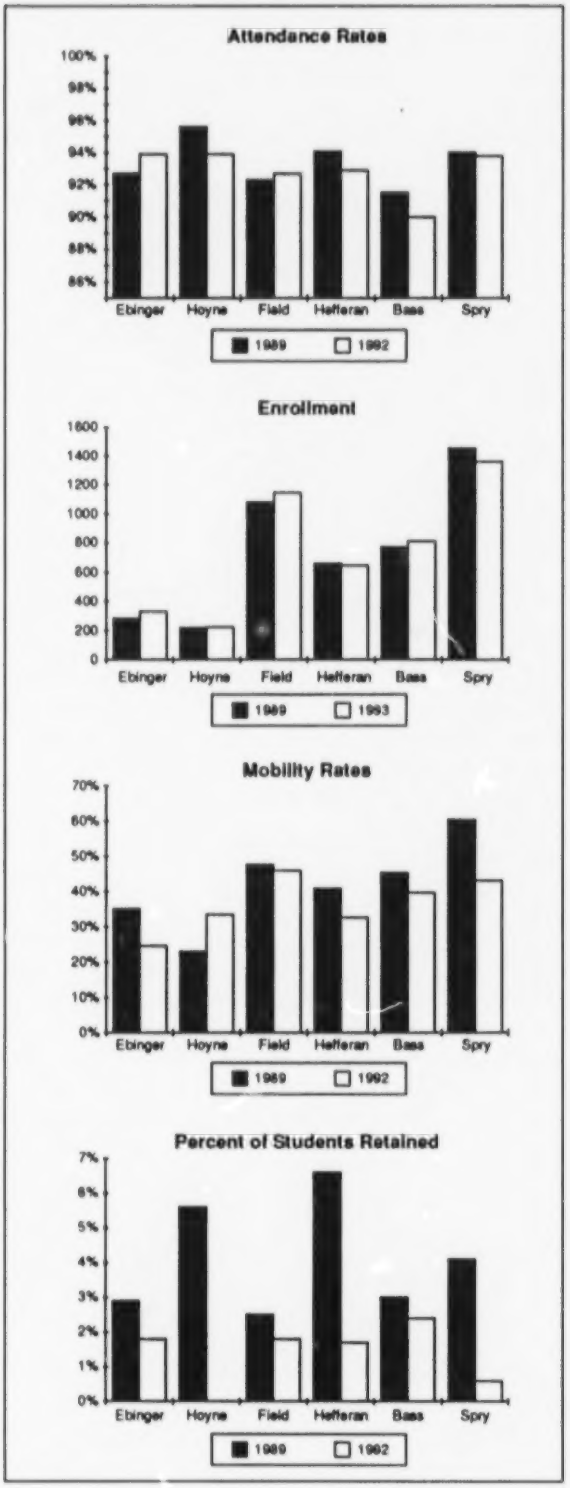
All of the EARS school had relatively high attendance rates when reform began, and we distinguished no significant changes since reform. Ebinger, Spry, Hoyne, and Hefferan have maintained attendance rates hovering around 94 percent. Bass and Field are a bit lower in the 91 to 92 percent range. While there is some room for improvement in the latter two schools, attendance at the other four was very good initially.

Turning to mobility rates and school enrollments, we observe some positive signs. Substantial declines in student mobility have been reported at Ebinger and Spry. Bass and Hefferan also show marked declines. The mobility at Field has remained relatively the same as before reform.[30] At Hoyne, student mobility took a jump in 1992 after having remained very stable at around 22 percent from 1989 through 1991. During 1992, Hoyne initiated an Options for Knowledge program that brought about some short term changes in the student enrollment.[31] In terms of student enrollment, Ebinger, Bass, and Field show increases. Hoyne and Hefferan have remained stable, and Spry shows a marked decline resulting from its efforts to reduce overcrowding.

Academic Progress

Reducing the number of students held back was an explicit aim of PA 85-1418. All six schools have

Short-Term Impact of Reform on Students



shown a drop in retaining students, with the declines particularly sharp at Hefferan, Hoyne, and Spry. This pattern holds generally for the CPS.[32] Many more Chicago students are now proceeding along with others their age than prior to reform.

Finally, as noted earlier, short term trends in student achievement are not very informative at this point. There are also difficult technical issues in judging school progress from these data as both the relatively high levels of student mobility and the substantial change in retention confound efforts to draw inferences about "whether schools are getting better." A separate report on this topic will be forthcoming later this year.

In terms of the EARS principals, however, they believe they are seeing some improvement in test scores. The principals at Bass, Hoyne, Ebinger, and Spry volunteered their own evidence about increases in student achievement. Moreover, by their words and actions, they clearly indicate that raising student achievement motivates most everything they do.

Principals' Voices on Student Achievement

EARS principals recognized that there is still more to do with regard to improving student achievement, and they are certainly not satisfied with the status quo. Here are some of their comments about current and future priorities:

Carlos Azcoitia at Spry: "*We are focusing extensively on student assessment and how do we really deal with the IGAP and ITBS. I have been emphasizing that we need to integrate the basic skills into teaching of all subject matter . . . Last year we have seen this gradual improvement in test scores. So we are closer to what we would like to be and are looking for ways to continue to grow. Testing is a part of the system, and we have to be able to deliver . . . Improvement is a gradual process. We are not going to see miracles here. But we are working on the process, and sustaining the process, and we are encouraged by what we have seen.*"

Don Anderson at Ebinger: "*So our scores are going to go up, but we have started with the kindergartners four years ago, so you figure it can be a nine year cycle . . . We know the test scores are important. We go into each year saying, 'We want an increase', but we are also not going to sacrifice the entire child's existence just to get a higher score. It all has to be part of having well-rounded children.*"

Nelda Hobbs at Field: "*School reform says we are supposed to be at national norms. As a team we met and agreed we cannot meet that. Let's be realistic. I have 200 new kids who speak no English and that has an impact . . . Everything we do focuses on staff development and impacting student achievement because the two are really inseparable.*"

Summing Up

Not surprisingly, EARS principals speak proudly about how far they have come, but they are also realistic about how far they still have to go and what it will take to get there. No one believes that the job is done, or even nearly done. When asked about future priorities, each principal spoke in his or her own way about staff development, improving instruction, creating a more humane and caring environment, developing more authentic and rigorous learning experiences for children, and further strengthening ties to parents and the community.

The work at Bass began prior to reform and, in some ways, this school is farthest along in the process. They have a stable professional community that appears to works well together. The increased autonomy and extra monies made available as part of reform have made it easier to pursue improvement efforts that prior to reform might have demanded "creative insubordination" to sustain.[33] At the other end of the scale, Field, Hefferan, and Spry were among the most troubled schools in the system prior to reform. The organizational development that has been accomplished there in just a few years has been quite remarkable. Our independent judgments in this regard are amply supported in extended testimony from many local participants, including parents, teachers, and students. All agree that reform has been a very positive experience.

Virtually all of the reform efforts have started under the direction of the current principals. They have brought a distinctive style of leadership, helping to guide their school organizations in the transition from rigid central control to collective democratic enablement in both the professional community and the local community. They have relied heavily on the support, encouragement, and leadership of many parents and local community members. A growing number of teachers are also now taking on important leadership roles within each of these schools. In many cases, these schools have made creative and effective use of their discretionary resources to catalyze these efforts.

Nevertheless, reform is still a very fragile process. It could easily be undermined in several ways: a change in school leadership as a principal moves on to new opportunities; a sudden loss of resources could mean the disintegration of effective new initiatives; or a reduction in staff could force out many of the new school leaders and disrupt the professional communities that are just beginning to form in individual schools. In short, the hopefulness and enthusiasm found in these schools must be tempered by the larger external realities in which each of these schools exist.

VII. Interpretive Commentary

In concluding this report, we offer a perspective from the local and national research community. Specifically, the remarks below have been assembled from reactions to an earlier version of this report offered by Steering Committee members of the Consortium on Chicago School Research and by a national group of researchers who advised on this study.

As a matter of course, the Consortium does not argue a particular policy position. Rather, it seeks to provide information to diverse audiences about the status and development of school improvement efforts in Chicago. The Consortium maintains that good policy emerges through fair competition of ideas informed by the best available evidence. Key to this process is an active discussion about the progress and problems of Chicago's schools under reform. The commentary presented below is offered in the spirit of stimulating more conversation about next steps.

Is School Reform Working?

There is always great interest in asking the "thumbs up/thumbs down" question. In terms of the perspective guiding this evaluation—Is the restructuring of the Chicago public school system evolving in ways that can lead to major improvements in student learning?

We answer "yes."

We estimate conservatively that of the schools most in need of change, where student assessment reports are significantly below national norms, one-third have developed strong democratic participation within their school community that is now focused on a systemic approach to whole school improvement. In addition, perhaps another third of the schools share some of these characteristics but are not as far along in the organizational change process.

But the question remains, "Is this a lot or a little?" Judged against the aims set out in the Chicago School Reform Act (PA 85-1418)—that all schools should reach national norms within five years—it is clearly not sufficient. As noted earlier, however, virtually any plan for restructuring Chicago's schools, regardless of its conceptual merits or the level of resources committed to it, would fail against this standard. A quick scan of the early progress of other urban districts engaging in system restructuring offers sobering testimony to the immensity of the task.

Such cross-district comparisons are tempting but ultimately unsatisfactory. Each system restructuring has its own logic and, during the early phases of development, can be judged fairly only against that logic. The major premise of PA 85-1418 is that enhanced participation at the school community level will leverage the systemic restructuring needed to sustain improvements in teaching and learning. Our analyses indicate that enhanced participation has emerged in many schools. Where this has occurred, fundamental organizational changes are highly likely, and "best" instructional practices are now being introduced. Many Chicago schools appear to be moving through an organizational development process consistent with the means-ends linkages assumed in the legislation. Against this standard, we judge the first phase of PA 85-1418 a success.

Next Steps for Schools Pursuing Systemic Change

Even in the most actively restructuring schools that have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by reform, the job is not done or nearly done. In the end, the key issue is student

achievement. Additional supports are needed if the initial progress is to culminate in substantially improved student learning.

Actively restructuring schools are heading in a productive direction. Conditions have been created in many schools for substantial improvements in classroom teaching—materials have been assembled, new strategies are being tried, new ideas have been introduced, and personal support for change is offered by both principals and parents. Nonetheless, by local participants' accounts, student achievement, while perhaps improving, is still not what they would like it to be.

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Major advances in student learning depend largely on enhancing the expertise of teachers. Our national research advisors agree that unless there is far greater investment in helping teachers to improve their craft, some advances in student achievement are possible, but the big jumps will likely remain elusive. At this point, the constraint becomes teachers' knowledge of their subject matter, of students' learning processes as they engage this subject matter, and of the pedagogic techniques most appropriate for teaching it to diverse groups of students.

Past studies of innovative math and science programs are quite telling in this regard.[34] With considerable personal effort, teachers can adopt new curricular materials and instructional techniques. Whether these changes generate the type of learning envisioned, however, is another matter. "Hands-on science" programs can provide a lot of hands-on work with materials but very little science. Students can have lots of experience with "estimation activities" in programs emphasizing "mathematics for understanding" but never learn how to distinguish a good estimate from a bad one or how to make a better one.

Issues raised: *The scale, intensity, and duration of the staff development needed greatly exceed current practices. A meaningful redress is likely to require a far greater commitment of resources. It may mean consideration of new roles within schools to assist the development of teachers' craft. It may also necessitate new organizational arrangements to supply support services to schools.*

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Current limits on teachers' time constrain how much more improvement can occur. Developments that have already occurred in actively restructuring schools have required increased time commitment from teachers, assumption of larger responsibilities within their school communities, and engaging in many new activities all in addition to an already full teaching day. These demands are only likely to increase as more attention focuses on changes in instruction that require teachers to abandon the well-tried, past practices and move into an uncomfortable terrain of trial and error.

Issues raised : *Until now, restructuring schools have relied heavily on teachers' good will to volunteer extra time and have sometimes used discretionary resources to partially remunerate these additional efforts. A more regular means for assuring sustained participation of school faculties is needed.*

At root, a normative shift is required. Schools must be seen as learning organizations, not just for students, but also for adults, where intensive, sustained efforts at improvement of practices become a regular part of school life.

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Individual teacher development may not produce the kind of school change demanded unless it is also accompanied by incentives that channel this individual initiative toward collective action. School restructuring aims to enhance both the coherence of instruction across subjects and grades and the coherence of the overall social environment. It calls for schools to become educative communities that afford substantial benefits to participants but also make demands on them. That is, systemic school change involves not only new structures for decision making but also new norms for professional work. For teachers, this means that some of the individual discretion that has tended to characterize the privacy of teaching behind a closed classroom door must now give way to more collaborative, coordinated efforts to enhance learning opportunities for children. For a school, this means that a faculty is no longer just a collection of individually certified teachers, but rather a professional team that has been assembled and developed to work productively as a team.

Issues raised: *Extant collective bargaining agreements, school code, and system policy need to be re-examined with an eye toward develop-*

ing incentives (and removing barriers) for the collective development of school faculties. It must also be recognized that sometimes a particular collection of staff who happen to be at a school cannot function as a productive work group. External consultation with conflict resolution and group process can help. Reshaping the composition of the faculty may also be required. The latter is a particularly nettlesome issue because it touches on concerns about faculty tenure and protection of individual teachers from arbitrary administrative action.

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While the aim of reform is to create self-guided school communities, we should not underestimate the effort involved in the transition from a system where school development was a centralized responsibility to a new organizational order where this expertise and capacity exists within school communities. On balance, it is important to recognize that school development is a new function for local school professionals. Neither teachers nor principals have typically had much prior experience with it, and the skills needed here are not normally included in their professional development programs.

Reform argued that schools need the freedom to establish programs that are responsive to local concerns. Further, the effective exercise of this freedom helps to foster a sense of local ownership and collective commitment that is an important part of the life blood of the actively restructuring schools. None of this, however, vitiates a second reality—many schools also need sustained outside support to use their newly gained freedom effectively.

Issues raised: *Decentralization has created a need for a new infrastructure to support individual school development. Future policy must consider how to create this support while both valuing local initiative and also recognizing the broad array of expertise, knowledge, and skill that schools need in order to develop. The central control of the past was problematic, but so is a hands-off approach that assumes that somehow each school will figure out what to do on its own.*

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Individual schools need an investment strategy for use of discretionary resources. As noted in our analysis of actively restructuring schools, large sums of money have been spent on materials, equipment, and additional staff. While these allocations appear to have been well spent, greater priority must be given to investments in improving the competencies of staff and their ability to work as a professional community. Expenditures on materials, equipment, and new programs can easily be justified as "for the kids." The payoffs from professional development, including efforts to help staff work better as a team, are less tangible. In the end, however, we return to our field observations and indicator analyses—simply adding more programs, more people, and more things won't make a school good unless the capacities of teachers to work with these things and people are substantially improved.

Issues raised: *For all of the current talk about technology, education is still fundamentally a social process of adults engaging children around subject matter. If we want better educated students, schools need to invest more in the adults who teach them.*

Strategies to Stimulate Initiative in the Schools Not Yet Touched by Reform

Our analyses indicate that a quarter of Chicago's elementary schools have unfocused improvement efforts and operate under consolidated principal power. Neither the parents and local community nor the faculty have been able to take advantage of existing opportunities to organize collective action toward systemic reform. Given these local political conditions, it seems unlikely that these schools will initiate the needed organizational changes on their own. The same thing can also be said of the four to nine percent of schools that still confront sustained conflict. A coordinated external response is needed here.

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Enhance the leadership capabilities of current principals. A major finding of our study of actively restructuring schools was the importance of facilitative, inclusive, visionary principal leadership. Like teachers, principals need sustained support and opportunities for professional development. Fortunately, there are already a number of organizations and programs in the city that seek to support principals

personally and help them develop their craft. There is also a growing number of principals within the system who have established expertise guiding school development under PA 85-1418 and who can effectively mentor others.

> ***Issues raised:*** *At the moment, these principal support services rely largely on external funding, are uncoordinated, and do not necessarily reach those principals who might benefit most. Another key area for policy consideration is how to maintain the system of supports and connect them with principals who need the support.*

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Enhance the capacities of LSCs to effectively exercise their responsibilities with regard to principal evaluation and selection. Three of the EARS schools were among the worst in the system when reform began. The changes that have occurred in these schools in the past two or three years are quite remarkable. In each case, the LSC's decision to recruit a new principal and to make a wise choice in this regard marked out a new direction for the school. A change in school leadership is sometimes the needed catalyst for organizational change.

> ***Issues raised:*** *Over the next two years, LSCs must evaluate their current principal and make a critical decision either to retain or to recruit a new one. No citywide capacity currently exists to assist LSCs in exercising this most important responsibility wisely. Moreover, since substantial turnover is a regular feature of most LSCs, this assistance will be needed as a standing capacity. This is another new function created by reform that needs to be addressed.*

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Developing a pool of new school leaders. For those schools committed to a change of leadership, there is a need for qualified principal candidates. The initial pool when reform began was quite large and talented. Given how demanding principals see their role under reform, that 300 new principals have already been hired since reform, and that many more will be needed in the next two years, a strategy must be implemented for constantly building this talent pool. Moreover, the uniqueness of the Chicago reform poses special problem here. School leadership in Chicago makes distinctive demands on principals' skills.

> ***Issues raised:*** *In addition to support for the professional development of current principals, systems are also needed to identify, recruit, and prepare future Chicago principals. The emerging teacher leaders within the system represent a large potential candidate pool. Structures to help these teachers become formally certified and to connect them with some of the more successful current principals and principal leadership centers would be one productive development.*

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Unless some outside influence is brought to bear, many of the school communities currently left behind by reform may not initiate a systemic improvement process on their own. In schools with consolidated principal power and unfocused improvement initiatives, both the current LSC and existing faculty groups tend to be weak. Attention must focus on how initiatives for change can emerge in these communities. Parent and community activism from a neighborhood-based organization is one route. Helping school faculties to organize can also be an effective assist. Last, if initiative for change does not emerge within a school community, under PA 85-1418 the central administration has an affirmative responsibility to act. While our analysis of the state of school reform documents remarkable progress, nonetheless upwards of 83,000 of Chicago's children still attend elementary schools left behind by reform.

> ***Issues raised:*** *A variety of groups, including the teachers' union, local colleges and universities, and other business and civic groups, could take a constructive role in this regard. The system also needs a capacity to combine governance intervention with school development in its most troubled schools.*

Systemwide Concerns

In order to maintain school leadership, we must listen to what the principals tell us. As noted in the introduction, several provisions of

PA 85-1418 were deliberately formulated to reshape the principalship in Chicago. As the Consortium reported in *Charting Reform: The Principals' Perspective* in December 1992, this has largely succeeded. Reform has brought many new leaders into schools. It has changed what they do and how they interact with parents, their local community, and school staff. Our report on the Experiences of Actively Restructuring Schools has further documented the key role that principals can play in initiating systemic reform in their buildings.

These observations cause us to return to the three major concerns voiced by principals in *Charting Reform: the Principals' Perspective*. First, when asked about their concerns, the principals replied, "Reduce the administrative burden." Second, they said they need more time and more support for staff development and for their own professional development. Third, they also complained about the difficulty of removing incompetent teachers and the lack of system support for this process.

On the personal side, appropriate recognition and rewards for principals also require more attention. As a result of the changes brought about by reform, principals' career path within the Chicago Public Schools remains uncertain. Prior to reform, a principal could aspire to move up into the central administration, but that career route has now largely disappeared. The main avenue currently available for increased responsibility, status, and remuneration involves leaving the system.

Issues raised: *Again, reform poses a new problem for the CPS. How will Chicago create career opportunities so that it can hold onto its current school leaders, so that they can institutionalize change in their schools and assist other principals to pursue these aims in their school communities?*

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Chicago needs an accountability system for schools and students. The first Consortium report, almost three years ago, analyzed the school system's need for an information system to monitor the progress of individual school improvement. This need remains as pressing today as ever. Further, central to such a system is valid information for judging trends in schools' efforts to improve student learning. Neither the current Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP) nor Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) program provides the kind of information school communities (and the larger public) need for making such judgments.

Chicago needs a new accountability system for gauging school and student progress. This system must signal clearly to students, their parents, and school professionals the knowledge, skills, competencies, and basic dispositions that are valued for all of Chicago's children. It must be capable of providing regular feedback to local participants about the school's progress with regard to these student outcomes. It must support the efforts of individual schools to create local assessments tailored to local needs. It must also provide information about whether schools are making changes in their day-to-day practice that will likely lead to future student improvements.

Today, the CPS spends in excess of $5,000 per pupil per year. Its current primary quality control system, the information provided by the ITBS, consumes about $3 per pupil per year to purchase and score. In a system seriously committed to improvement, this gross imbalance between service expenditure and quality control must be redressed.

Issues raised: *Creating a new accountability and reporting system is not a trivial task. It will require several years to develop fully the necessary procedures and instruments. A transitional plan between current operations and the desired future system will probably also be needed. The final plan will surely demand a substantial commitment of new funds to implement. Even though the tangible benefits from a new student performance accountability system will take a few years to materialize, it is essential that the system invest now in that future.*

❖

School reform and improvement activities are more likely to be productive in small schools. Many efforts are currently underway to create smaller organizational units through schools-within-schools, and even chartering new schools. Our results certainly support these new initiatives and encourage further policy considerations in this area.

Issues raised: *A modest system investment of funds to stimulate further initiatives here could have quite favorable cost/benefit returns. This might take a variety of forms, including technical assistance to schools pursuing school-within-school options or initiat-*

ing grants to provide venture capital for teacher entrepreneurs to form new, small schools.

The Fragility of Reform and the School Fiscal Crisis

While we are greatly encouraged by what we have observed in actively restructuring schools, we are also struck by the fragility of these improvements. The loss of effective school leadership, a reduction in funds that support the new restructuring initiatives, or the loss of recently hired teachers and aides who staff new programs could quickly eviscerate these gains.

Much of the first phase of reform has focused on rebuilding a sense of agency among both parents and professionals with regard to neighborhood schools. It is their willingness to commit personal effort, and the growing collective enablement of school communities that are most at risk now in the current fiscal crisis. All that has been accomplished in schools over the last four years could easily come unraveled in a few short months.

The fiscal solution must assure some stability to the system over the years ahead. Budget crises have dominated school reform throughout much of its first four years. There is only a limited number of important issues that top leadership in any organization can entertain at any one point in time. Unless fiscal issues are moved to the back burner, the school system may never devote sufficient attention to how it might best support the work of schools.

Substantial efforts have been made to restructure schools in Chicago. Inadequate financial support at this time would have only disastrous effects on these budding initiatives.

Endnotes

1. *Chicago Tribune* (1988). James D. Squires, the *Tribune* editor at the time of the series, made this statement in the preface to *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America" (1988)*.
2. See Brodt (1988), p. 1.
3. These data and other selected statistics were reported by Moore (1990).
4. This statement also comes from the preface to *Chicago Schools: "Worst in America"* (1988).
5. Although schools were required to generate their first school improvement plans in 1989-90, there was neither time nor guidance for this process, and the resultant documents had little real content. See Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning, Chicago Public Schools (1990) for the analysis of the content of School Improvement Plans. See Easton and Storey (1990) for a description of first-year LSCs.
6. See for example Louis and Miles' (1990) accounts of high school improvement efforts. Comer (1980) reports that it took a minimum of five years to effect measurable improvements in the New Haven Connecticut schools in which he worked. The now highly touted alternative schools in District 4 in New York City evolved over a period of ten to twenty years. Thus, even in these "best cases," organizational change took many years to materialize fully.
7. The synthesis was undertaken by an unusual collaboration between two Consortium members: the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago (CSI) and the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance. For the past three years, these two organizations have been engaged in two separate case study projects involving twenty-two Chicago elementary schools. In both projects, staff have attended a large number of LSC, PPAC, and other school meetings and events since the start of reform. They have also conducted interviews with principals, with LSC and PPAC chairs and representatives, and with members of school faculties, parents, and community members.

   To develop this framework, field workers from CSI and the Panel collaborated on a synthesis of their observations about the nature of local school governance and improvement efforts. They reviewed each of their case study schools in terms of the base conditions at the start of reform; the role of parents and community members, the principal, and the school faculty in local decision-making; and the emerging capacity of the school to initiate and sustain improvement efforts. They also invited the participation of researchers who were evaluating the CPS's Creating a New Approach to Learning (CANAL) project and researchers from the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL), who conducted case studies for the School Finance Authority. These individuals

reacted to the emerging frameworks for describing local school governance and school improvement based on their own observations and experiences.

8. See Easton et al. (1991) *Charting reform: The teachers' turn* and Bennett et al. (1992) *Charting reform: The principals' perspective.*

9. This was formally defined as a composite IGAP score of less than 235.

10. See for example Ball (1987) and Blase (1989, 1991).

11. For a general discussion of these issues, see for example Barber (1984) and Evans and Boyte (1986). In the specific context of school improvement, see Katz (1987, 1992). Barber's distinction between weak and strong democracy is especially relevant to this analysis. The label for the fourth type was specifically chosen in recognition of this.

12. For the purpose of analyzing political activity in this context, we have relied heavily on a recent report of the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance which developed a framework to describe differences in governance approaches among Local School Councils. Each of the four approaches—limited, excessive, moderate, and balanced—shares many characteristics with one of the types described in this report. This report's framework differs because the Panel focused on LSCs. Here, we are looking more broadly at an entire school community, and especially at the role of teachers in governance and decision making. See Easton et al. (1993).

13. For further discussion see Easton et al. (1993).

14. These classifications are based on a statistical technique called discriminant analysis. The upper and lower bound estimates were established by varying the probability of a correct classification. By setting the probability very high (0.90) we have a lower bound estimate. In contrast, the upper bound estimate derives from setting a somewhat lower classification probability (0.75). For further details, see the companion technical report.

15. Seven of the case-study synthesis schools were categorized as having maintenance politics. Only three of these, however, had spring 1989 IGAP averages below 235. Thus, our case basis for validating indicators for this type was small. In addition, the distinctive character of interaction among the sites of power here is quite subtle and difficult to measure through survey questions. Consequently, we are unable to determine precise percentages of schools in this category.

16. For this descriptive section, a probability of 0.82 (the midpoint between 0.75 and 0.9) was chosen in the discriminant analysis to classify schools.

17. These ratios are based on probability theory. Technically, they are the probability that a school is a particular type given that the school has a certain background characteristic divided by the overall probability of a school being that type. In equation form:

$$Pr[type_i | characteristic_j] / Pr[type_i]$$

For example, the ratio for adversarial schools in the relatively advantaged income category (less then 50 percent low income) is computed by dividing the percentage of schools with less than 50 percent low income students that are adversarial by the percentage of adversarial schools in the population. Thus, ratios which are greater than one imply overrepresentation, that is, a higher percentage within the type than in the population; ratios less than one imply underrepresentation.

18. For a poignant ethnographic account of children growing up under these conditions see Kotlowitz (1991). The context for this research was the west side of Chicago.

19. The role of social capital and the importance of functional communities to the work of schools is developed in Coleman and Hoffer (1987) and Coleman (1988). Closely related ideas can also be found in Comer (1980, 1988).

20. The notion of a systemic approach to school improvement has been discussed in variety of places. We use this term in the sense defined by Fullan (1991) and Louis and Miles (1992) to include changes both in the organizational structure of schools (including how decisions are made) and in the culture of the institution. For a discussion of systemic reform from the perspective of state policy, see Smith and O'Day (1992). Also check recent works by Elmore (1993), Murphy (1991), Lieberman (1990), and Darling-Hammond (1990), which all speak to this issue.

21. Again, we used a discriminant analysis based on the schools from the case-study synthesis project to develop the classification further. Probabilities of 0.90 and 0.75 were used to establish the lower and upper bounds respectively. For more details, see the companion technical report.

22. The specific survey items used here were drawn from an inventory compiled at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We wish to acknowledge the assistance of Fred Newmann for the use of these materials.

23. See Bennett et al. (1992) *Charting Reform: The principals' perspective* for a full description of the categorization.

24. This section evolved out of complex process to which a large number of individuals have contributed. It began with individual case debriefings on each school by the field staff who visited that school. A "first cut" report outline evolved out of a six-hour Sunday meeting in early April in which most of the field staff participated along with a few core Consortium staff. In creating an

integrated and interpretative framework for these collected observations, we have also drawn on other extant scholarship on school change and restructuring (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Elmore, 1993; Fullan, 1991; Lieberman, 1990; Louis and Miles, 1990). In this latter regard, we are especially indebted to the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This framework has been most directly influenced by emerging observations from the work of Kent Peterson, Fred Newmann (Center Director), Karen Seashore Louis, and Gary Wehlage. Observations by Mary Ann Raywid from case studies of alternative schools in New York City have also played a significant role.

25. As part of negotiating access to each school, we guaranteed anonymity to individual teachers and students. As a result, we have decontextualized teacher and as well as student comments. Principals were aware that the participating schools would be named in the report, which meant that they too would be identified by name. Not mentioning individual teachers and students by name only reflects our confidentiality agreements; it does not imply their contributions to their schools or the significance of their ideas are any less important.

26. The LSC's role was not an explicit focus in the EARS study since extensive documentation already exists in the Panel and the CSI studies. The main thrust of the EARS project was on the development of instructional improvement and the factors that contribute to it. For a more general treatment of high-performing councils and the full range of their contributions to school improvement see Easton et al. (1993).

27. For discussion of engaging broader participation in systemic change, see for example Weisbord (1991) and Tafel and Bertani (1992). See also Darling-Hammond (1989), Smith and O'Day (1990); Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert (1993); Little and McLaughlin (1993).

28. See Louis and Miles (1990), also Fullan (1992).

29. To gain a sense of students' experiences in actively restructuring schools, we interviewed small groups of sixth and eighth graders who were in the classes we observed. About 75 students, divided about evenly between boys and girls, were interviewed.

30. Personal communication with the principal has raised questions about the accuracy of these data at Field School.

31. Personal communication with school principal.

32. See the "Data Books" of the Chicago Panel.

33. Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie, and Hurwitz (1984).

34. For studies of the early implementation of the California Mathematics Framework, see articles by Ball, Cohen, Peterson, Wiemers, and Wilson in the Fall 1990 issue of *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. For evaluation studies of hands-on-science, see National Center for Improving Science Education, (1989).

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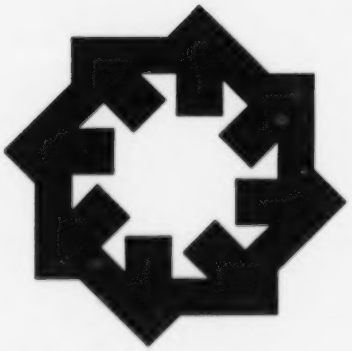
Note: A longer technical report, which provides further research details about the results summarized here, is available from the Consortium.



The Consortium on Chicago School Research

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Background

The Consortium on Chicago School Research is an independent federation of Chicago area organizations which have come together to undertake a range of research activities designed to advance school improvement in the city and assess the progress of school reform. It aims to:

- Encourage broad access to the research agenda setting process;
- Advocate for the collection of systematic information on the condition of education in the city;
- Collaborate on selected studies;
- Assure high standards of quality in research design, data collection, and analysis; and
- Promote wide dissemination and discussion of research findings.

The Consortium is deliberately multi-partisan. Its membership includes faculty from area universities, research staff from the Chicago Public Schools and the Illinois State Board of Education, researchers in advocacy groups, as well as other interested individuals and organizations. The Consortium views research not just as a technical operation of gathering data and publishing reports, but as a process of community education advanced through sustained public discourse.

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